Chapter II
Gendered Social Order and its Representation

The term gender came into vogue in literature in the 1970s and was adopted from grammar. The origin of the word however, lies in the Indo-European word root which means ‘to produce’. Grammar uses the word to classify nouns on the basis of ‘sex’. In fact, most of the dictionaries define gender as a division of nouns into masculine, feminine and neutral. However, grammar in itself is highly unstable as different languages have different rules of grammar and hence gender too becomes a non-rigid field. R. W. Connell refers to the word ‘terror’ and tells that it is feminine in French, masculine in German and neutral in English.

Another definition of gender in most dictionaries is the biological categorization of the male and the female. In this respect, it plays a part in everyday life of individuals outside grammar. In fact, the very distinction into man and woman is a basic form of gender that is common in a society. R. W. Connell says, “In everyday life we normally take gender for granted. We instantly recognize a person as a man or woman, girl or boy...Conventional marriages require one of each. Mixed doubles tennis requires two of each, but most sports require one kind at a time” (3). This seems so much a part of routine that it assumes the status of naturalness, something that has existed in the society for time immemorial. Along with it come certain gender distinctions which too are considered ‘normal’. “…the American Super Bowl, in which a hundred million people watch a strikingly gendered event: large armoured men crash into each other in pursuit of a leather ball, and thin women in short skirts dance and smile in the pauses...These arrangements are so common, so familiar, that they can seem part of the order of nature...that gender distinction is ‘natural’...” (Connell 3).

However, in literature, gender moves beyond this biological difference between the man and the woman. Feminists utilized it to distinguish literature as being male dominated. The major agenda of feminism, especially First Wave Feminism, is the biological difference between the male and the female. The Second Wave Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir added: ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’. This was a move to the cultural and social order in a society for determining the ‘femaleness’ of a woman. While feminism sees the male and the female defined
biologically, gender attributes the definition to culture. It is a distinction between one being 'sexual' in nature while the other 'cultural'. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Acting Bits/Identity Talk" opines, "...sex and gender are structurally not identical" (803). In other words, gender implies that the male and the female are culturally defined. This widens the scope of gender as compared to feminism. The latter believes in woman vs the man dichotomy in a world largely man dominated whereas the former holds that the society has a dichotomy of the masculine and the feminine with the masculine reigning over the feminine, both determined by the social order in place. Robert P. Goldman opines, "...the concept of 'sex' ...[are] the biological or anatomical aspects of ones sexual persona and 'gender'...generally [referring] to the complex of constructions, attitudes and orientations that define ones social role as a gendered being" (375).

This means that there is a gender order that exists in a society and every individual fits into that order. In other words, each individual is placed in a gender order from birth and then reacts to that space through their actions. If these actions conform to the 'norms' prevalent then the individual enjoys, what R. W. Connell calls "gender polarity". The society does not change these 'norms' easily, rather it attempts to sustain them as well as the resulting inequalities.

These inequalities can be categorized into the powerful-powerless with the powerful (masculine) prevailing over the powerless (feminine). Traditionally, the biological female is categorized as the powerless, the feminine, while the male, as the powerful, the masculine. The reason for this distinction is the old androcentric set-up in societies in which the males have prevailed over the females. Robert P. Goldman adds, "...male dominated cultures have been able to establish a univocal yet hegemonic ideology of gender" (376).

The term gender, then, does not refer only to “the cultural difference of women from men, based on the biological division between the male and female” (Connell 8). There is more to it than this dichotomous division. Society has manipulated this simple dichotomy into a complex structure intertwining with the values of culture and society. Hence a modified definition, "Gender is, above all, a matter of the social relations within which individual and groups act" (Connell 9). This definition, based on the social relationships, includes the 'social norms' that govern and modify gender.
Gender, then, in literature is a social structure, a representation of the social arrangements wherein the cultural patterns ‘express’ even the bodily differences.

Gender, thus, is not merely the distinction between the biological male and the female but deals with the masculine and the feminine, terms beyond the domain of biology and largely dependent on the social norms. Broadly, masculine traits include the dominating, powerful, aggressive and rational while the feminine includes the dominated, powerless and the irrational and emotional. The terms are an example of binary opposites wherein the first symbolizes the positive while the second, negative. Masculine and feminine are seen in gender as such wherein the masculine becomes the ‘self’ while the feminine becomes the ‘other’ and the social norms attribute masculinity among others to men making them the ‘self’, the wanted, while femininity to women, making them the ‘other’, the unwanted. Stephen M. Whitehead in Introduction to Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions asserts “...the relationship between women and men is not now nor ever has been, in most societies, an equitable one...males come to believe in their innate superiority over women” (1).

However, it is pertinent to note that gender does not as a rule attribute masculinity to the male while femininity to the female. It is rather a social construct and hence it is the prevailing social order that defines masculinity and femininity. In other words, Gender allows masculinity to the woman and femininity to the man, if ‘social norms’ so permit. Whitehead says: “These processes are never fixed and never settled. They are under constant revision, negotiation and movement; in which case the idea that a core masculinity lies deep in men’s inner biological state, to be rendered unto the social through men’s natural propensities, is just not tenable” (5). But any such attempts to reach such conclusions are ‘normally’ seen as aberrations to the set social systems, as he further adds, “Yet men and masculinities are also symbiotically entwined, in so much as they coexist in a political landscape that assumes a natural gender order to things” (Whitehead 5).

However, gender relates largely to the man-woman difference and the attributing of masculinity and femininity to them; any anomaly to the ‘standard norm’ is not taken very comfortably by the society. The norms may change with time but at a given point they are rigid and no flexibility is allowed easily. As Patrick D. Hopkins says in “How
Feminism Made a Man Out of Me: The Proper Subject of Feminism and the Problem of Men:

Most binary sexual difference ideologies seem to contain categories…and more often than not these categories are criminal ones, either legal or cultural or both. For example, when observing a boy playing with dolls…get classified as “sissies,” “homos,” or “faggots”—and not surprisingly, categories encompassing the “feminine” boy are most unpleasant. Similarly, it is not unusual for girls or women who are assertive, play rugby,…to be categorized as “tomboys,” “butches”” “dykes”, or “ballbreakers. (44).

Gender, hence, seems to dwell on the essential difference between the male and the female and this equation is clearly weighted against the female who becomes the negative in this tussle of binary opposites. Again, this status of binary opposites is something that is attributed to a society wherein patriarchy is prevalent. Gender, hence, dwells on the biological difference of the male and the female in a society even though its scope is much larger than that. Robert P. Goldman is of the opinion that the distinction between ‘sexual difference’ and ‘cultural difference’ is “significantly blurred” (375).

Another gender aspect associated with ‘man-woman’ dichotomy is the ‘powerful-powerless’ relationship. It is the one that modifies the ‘man-woman’ relationship to that of ‘masculine-feminine’ duality. Man as masculine and woman, feminine, or the man feminine and woman, masculine is largely dependent on the power structures prevalent in the society. The ‘feminine’ is not only the female but every individual who is oppressed by the powerful. For Jotirao Phule, all the castes subordinate to Brahmans were the shudra/iishudras along with women, were the feminine, the oppressed. G. P. Deshpande opines that Phule was the first shudra thinker to deeply examine the gender question and he included “all women, in his notion of shuddratishudra” (IV).

Literature has explored this gendered social order through time and space, consciously and unconsciously. The chapter seeks to explore how ‘gender’ has been treated in the five social milieus in the five literary works. It also examines the treatment of ‘man-
woman' dichotomy as represented in the India of the five novelists. In the representation of gender by the five authors, it is important to understand how they have placed the male and the female characters in their respective social settings.

Moreover, as gender accommodates more aspects than merely the man-woman dichotomy, the chapter shall also look into the 'powerful-powerless' dichotomy. The hierarchization of the social order according to the 'power principle' and the execution of power on its basis shall be explored. Finally, how the masculine and the feminine have been created and treated in the backdrop of the social circumstances in each text along with the repercussions of such a division shall be looked into.

*A Passage to India* deals primarily with the colonizer-colonized question and all the other aspects revolve around this primary political situation. This political situation can be placed in the domain of gender and most traditional critics have sought to do the same. The text has been variously evaluated as the tussle between the colonizer as the masculine and the colonized as the feminine with the masculine prevailing over the feminine, as in a traditional gendered establishment. Indians are a race inferior to the British and without any distinct identity, with the minor exception of Dr Aziz whose character is attributed to the sympathetic attitude of Forster to the Indian cause. Ronny sees the Indians as a 'race' with no individuality and hence uses the grand rule of 'holding this wretched country by force'. Secondly, the biological female subservient to the male is the other gender order analyzed in the text. The British women are subservient to their British male counterparts while the Indian women are hardly visible in the text before their male counterparts.

Prominently, it is the British male hegemony that is seen as paramount in the text by critics. Forster is English and a male and this British masculinity is seen at several places in the narrative. Shikha Misra says, “The British masculine gaze fixes India in the eternal role of seductive, titillating and irresistible female object” (60). In the following speech of Adela one finds, as Misra says, the “knowing voice of the male narrator” (60): “How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats, their quarrels the malaise of men who cannot find their way home. India knows of this trouble. She knows of the whole world’s trouble, to this uttermost depth. She calls ‘Come’ through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and
august. But come to what? She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal” (*A Passage to India* 150).

His sympathies, several critics assert, are with the Indians but his English roots restrict him from presenting the Indian perspective objectively. He seeks a ‘passage into India’ that eludes him throughout. As an Englishman his inability to find one is not debatable but his reluctance to question the validity of British presence in India becomes debatable. His sympathizing with the Indians and supporting the British at the same time creates an anomaly that emerges from the text making it ambiguous. “However sympathetic they intend to be, the interpreters of Indian identity were ultimately restricted to their personal value bases” (Bose Sarika 219). Forster belonged to this category of writers and this shows in his work.

Writing certainly is not a neutral process but dependant on ‘belongingness’ and affinity. Forster does not seem to ‘belong’ to the ‘setting’ of the text but rather appears, consciously or unconsciously, a representative of the colonizers. Peter Childs asserts, “…India crucially differed from Italy and Greece in that it was a part of the British Empire and its relationship to England and the English was in many ways more complex. Here the English were rulers as well as foreigners, and their behavior was always meant to represent something more important than themselves” (8).

Moreover, the feasibility of a male representing the female, biologically as well as socially, has been questioned. How can Forster, a male speak for the ‘other’, the female. The masculinity of Forster questions his suitability as a ‘voice’ for the Indian and the English women and the relationship they share with each other. Arun Mukherjee makes an important observation when he asserts the importance of a ‘voice of’. He says, “As readers, we must examine and remain aware of the difference between ‘a voice for’ and ‘a voice of’” (qtd in Karyn 235). Forster here “has constructed a ‘voice for’ Indian women” (Karyn 235) as also for the English women. However the ‘voice for’ the English women is slightly closer as compared to the ‘voice for’ the Indian women because Forster is a British. Perhaps, aware of his distance from India and Indian women, their construct is minimal in *A Passage to India*. Flora Annie Steel’s daughter asserts in the Preface to the *Indian Scene*, “One special point should be noted. No man can know the intimate life of the Indian
peoples. He cannot even enter the heart of India—the women’s quarters—much less gain the confidence and affection of their inmates” (qtd in Shirwadkar 7).

However, looking at the text, gender assumes more complicated forms as it follows not only the basic principle of biological differences of man and woman and the colonizer-colonized duality but also the social and racial differences dividing the English and the Indian. The representation of gender, then, becomes problematic as women get categorized into the British and the Indian women. A number of commentators have underlined that the women in the text are subordinate to the men. However, this generalization places the British females in a situation where they are not merely the ‘other’ but the ‘self’ according to the racial and colonial hierarchization and hence superior to the Indian male. Where, then, does the text place the likes of Dr Aziz, Mrs Moore and Adela Quested? The construction and representation of gender, thus, is done at various levels by Forster.

At one level, there is the Anglo-Indian description of Adela which also reflects the gendered society of the British. The Collector characterizes her as “...an English girl fresh from England—...” (A Passage to India 182). For the British women she is “our sister” (199) and “my own darling girl” (199) for Mrs Turton. The description of the Collector reflects the order in the British society where a female is seen as a ‘physical subject’. That she is ‘fresh’ hints at her sexuality which the British own. The use of the words ‘sister’ and ‘own darling’ symbolizes affiliations of the British women with Adela’s position as subjects of the British males. Paul B. Armstrong opines, “...these categories [have] more to do with Anglo-Indian sexual and racial stereotypes and mechanisms of cultural self-definition than with Adela’s...” (373).

Secondly, Adela, in addition to being the ‘subject’ is also the member of the master race, the English in India. Hence, as a colonizer she is superior to the native male even though as a female she stands below the Indian male. To accommodate her colonial superiority, it is necessary to moderate her sexuality which is done through the supposed assault and attempted rape of her by Dr Aziz. The alleged molestation puts the blame of exciting the sexuality of Adela on Dr Aziz, the Indian male and the racial ‘other’, while Adela sustains the mantle of ‘purity’ of the British woman. Aziz’s character, then, becomes a racially and sexually constructed ‘other’, and more evidently, he becomes a symbol of what Benita Parry calls “sexualizing of race”
Paul B. Armstrong says for the incident: “...the construct of the British purity [is] under threat from a sexually dangerous racial Other...” (374). The gender order places Aziz as inferior as he is colonized and hence is the one who has to take the blame of the sexual construct of the British women in the text. Adela’s questioning Aziz about his marriage and children prior to the incident also reflects her attraction towards the ‘handsome little Oriental’ (*A Passage to India* 169). Her attraction towards Aziz can be seen as the arousal of a sexual desire in her but being a member of the superior race, it cannot be reflected so. Hence, the blame for rousing her sexuality rests on Aziz. Brenda R. Silver observes: “In his fiction he continually evokes a scenario in which a darker, more sensual, usually foreign and/or lower class character initiates the repressed, often intellectual English man or woman into an awareness of his or her sexuality” (88).

When the ‘alleged incident’ with Adela takes place, Aziz is not with her. This is evident from the fact that at that time Aziz is not ‘alone’ but in the company of the narrator and the reader. Paul B. Armstrong states: “The reader is with Aziz in another cave at the moment the assault is said to have occurred...from the moment Aziz is arrested, the reader knows he is innocent...” (373). The reader knows that the ‘truth’ is that Aziz is innocent, but the problem is, in spite of his omniscient nature, the third person narrator refrains from divulging the ‘truth’ of the cave where Adela was present. Armstrong adds, “…we are never certain what really did happen to Adela in the cave...— and Forster himself claimed not to know...” (374).

In the wake of the ‘ignorance’ of the narrator, Adela’s statement carries weight owing to her Britishness. What it asserts is that the entire Marabar episode is another attempt to categorize the Indian male as one belonging to a culturally inferior race and reducing the racially ‘other’ to a physicality, a promoter of illfeelings in the minds of the ‘pure’ and ‘fresh’ English. Brenda R. Silver opines: “...it [Marabar episode] functions as well to reduce Aziz to a physicality that can then be subordinated to the authority vested in the greater power of the legal system” (98). Aziz, then, is a victim of, what Quentin Bailey calls, “a notion of sexuality conceived of in terms of race” (326). The allegation of raping the British female is actually the raping of the Indian male through the accusation of rape. Benita Parry asserts in “Materiality and
Mystification in *A Passage to India*, “To the Anglo-Indians, Miss Quested is the victim of the infamous lust of Indian men…” (179).

However, the other social order where the male is superior to the female does not allow the male to be completely suppressed by the female. Hence, Adela has to take back her accusations and Aziz is freed and declared innocent. Her ‘rape’, however, assumes the status of a rebellion against the traditional social order where the male defines the female and her status as the ‘subject’. The ‘rape’ in this sense, is her ‘voice’ against her femininity which the male dominated order has repressed. Brenda R. Silver hits the nail on the head when she says: “For Adela, then, to speak rape becomes an act of resistance” (105).

Adela, thus, emerges as one who ‘wants to be raped’ rather than Aziz or any male trying to do so, as Brenda R. Silver asserts: “...we might add, Adela wants to be raped” (87). The English men and the Indian men share a discourse where the women are silenced. In other words, the ‘Caves’ emerge as a tool reflecting sexuality within a discourse of power where the biological difference and the racial difference come face to face and the former prevails over the latter. Adela, thus, becomes ‘rapable’ in the text. Silver adds, “…violation or rape [is]...in terms of a deployment of sexuality within a discourse of power that posits a complex network of sameness and difference” (88). This rapability defines Adela in the text, as the ‘other’ to the male. Simone de Beauvoir asserts that “Power to create the world...is power in its male form” (qtd in Silver 90).

The Marabar caves incident presents a peculiar situation before the reader: juxtaposition of a colonized male and a colonizer female. Aziz is the colonized but alongside this he is a male while Adela, though she is the colonizer is a female and the narrative juxtaposes the two. However, this concept of ‘either and or’ ultimately blows over with her withdrawing the charges levelled against Aziz who goes through a humiliating ordeal with the British proclaiming him guilty even before the court trial begins. The entire episode puts forward the point-of-view in the text wherein the feminine is subdued by the masculine, making the colonized male and the colonizer female both the ‘other’. “For Sharpe, Forster’s novel poses a problem that is ‘particularly vexing’ for feminists: Which is the real crime, Adela’s accusation or Aziz’s alleged assault? This choice forces critics to defend their colonized male Aziz
or colonizer female Adela, with the result that this ‘either/or decision (but neither/both) has divided anti-colonial criticism’ of *A Passage to India* along gender lines...Sharpe concludes...that, ‘by deploying ‘rape’ as a master trope for the objectification of English women and natives alike, [literary critic Brenda] Silver produces a category of ‘Other’ that keeps the colonized hidden from history’” (Burke 30).

In doing so, then, the Indian male and the British female, both, become subjects to the British male. Fielding’s preference to accompany Adela after the case and his insistence that Aziz not push for compensation can be seen as the subjugation of the Indian male by the British male more than the ‘humanistic’ attitude of Fielding. Paul B. Armstrong opines, “Forster questions the possibility of justice and consensus by splitting Fielding off from the celebrating Indian party...” (376). Hence, it emerges that not only the ‘female’ is the feminine but the Indian male is equally the ‘other’ for the British male. In such a situation, the British men are the masculine while the British women and the Indian male move between masculinity and femininity between each other but remain the feminine for the British male.

The other British females are equally dominated by the males. Ronny, for example, thinks that, “His mother ought to leave India at once: she was doing no good to herself or to anyone else there” (*A Passage to India* 229). This ‘resentment’ against his mother’s stay in India comes because she tries to understand India in a way incomprehensible for Ronny. As a result, he believes it is better if she leaves the country as her way is quite unbecoming of the British and their masculinity.

Moreover, Ronny breaks off the engagement with Adela. This becomes a complex issue in the light of the fact that Adela has already refused to marry him prior to the cave incident. This shows the English male attitude towards the female. When Adela refuses to marry Ronny, it is not an issue, nor is it worth considering, but the moment Ronny breaks it off, it is the ‘big breaking news’. In their ‘power structure’ Adela is the ‘other’ while Ronny is the ‘self’ and hence carries authority, something Adela cannot have. Moreover, Ronny, as part of the power structure is set to lose the ‘power’ if he indulges in any relationship with the ‘powerless’ and more importantly any such action will be ‘unenglish’. This brings to the fore what Brenda R. Silver calls “the inseparable connection between gender, representation, and power” (89).
Ronny is the masculine hence has the right to wield power and represent things his way. As a result he leaves Adela ‘officially’ unfazed by the fact that she has already refused to marry him. Connell remarks: “Boys are...taught the importance of appearing hard and dominant – whether they feel like or not” (3). Ronny, the masculine has to show sturdiness and dominance, hence to maintain that order the breaking of the agreement has to come from him.

Also, Ronny expected Adela to stay with him after marriage rather than go to England. On his behalf he is ready to send her to cooler places in summers to save her from the excessive heat. “Most women (British) served by merely existing as wives or supporters for officials of the empire” (Bose Sarika 219-220). Forster has presented the British female characters in this light in the novel. Be it characters like Mrs. Turton or Adela, the British women are expected to remain in the background of their ‘official’ husbands.

Finally, the Indian females who, one finds, do not emerge out of shadows in the text. The British women see them as inferior. Mrs Turton says to Adela and other English ladies, “You’re superior to them, anyway. Don’t forget that. You’re superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis, and they’re on an equality” (A Passage to India 42). This statement and the use of the word ‘everyone’ gives it a colonial colour. The word, free of gender and sexual limitations, goes on to place all the natives conveniently as ‘the other’. It is thus clear that the Indians, male as well as female, are portrayed as ‘the other’. Sarika P. Bose comments, “…on the one hand, British women deplored the devouring Indian mother and, on the other hand, posited the Indian woman as a child who needed a (British) mother to set her straight” (219).

The Indian women identify with what Salman Rushdie describes in Imaginary Homelands, “a ‘minority inside a minority’—a position with which I feel some sympathy,...” (168). The Indian women are present once when Hamidullah’s wife is worried over the marriage of her ‘daughters’, should males refuse to marry them. Then, pretty much late in the novel one gets to hear something for ‘the twice other’, the Indian female, from the Indian male. Aziz writes poems, all dedicated to one topic, “Oriental womanhood”. He holds that, “The purdah must go, otherwise we shall never be free” (A Passage to India 329). He adds that had the women fought along
with men in the Battle of Plassey, India would never have been conquered. He also adds, “But we do not show our women to the foreigner” (329).

Looking at the nationalist struggle in the 1920s, the call for a unified resistance by men and women was given by Gandhi. He implored them to come out and fight for the nation. Forster was certainly not unaware of the developments in India during the 1920s and the intense struggle for independence, especially under Gandhi who wanted women to participate equally in the movement. The Muslim women who sit on a Hunger Strike when Aziz is arrested for the alleged assault on Adela is one instance where the otherwise invisible Indian women emerge for once. Benita Parry says, “...with Aziz’s arrest...Moslem women, perceived by the Anglo-Indians as invisible, go on hunger strike...” (178). This strike by the women can be analyzed in the light of the social backdrop and the growing influence of Gandhi and his use of hunger strike as a major tool for waging war against the British. This also is of a piece with the ending that asserts the impossibility of a friendship between the Indians and the English who are conquerors. Brenda R. Silver avers: “Forster’s...discourse [is] rooted within a Western, First-world framework...run[s] the risk of appropriating the Indians in the novel for our own ends” (88).

However, mostly, the Indian female remains in the periphery and at the lowest rung in the ladder of gender hierarchy. The very beginning of the narrative addresses the issue through a lady herself. The wife of Hamidullah says, “Wedlock, motherhood, power in the house – for what else is she born, and how can the man who has denied them to her stand up to face her creator and his own at the last day?” (A Passage to India 11).

A two-fold problem arises here. First, the use of words ‘wedlock’, ‘motherhood’ and ‘power in the house’ in the narrative by Forster raises the controversial issue of ‘women’s area of work’. Is a woman only to be married, manage the household and beget children? Madhusraba Dasgupta echoes the same question when she says that “a woman is nothing but a commodity created for men’s convenience. This construct requires that silence, submission, and obedience be seen as qualities to be valued over all others...” (53). Aziz, the protagonist, is earlier married without ‘seeing’ his to-be-wife and he confesses delivering the first child out of ‘animal’ lust before falling in love with her. His wife, however, uncomplaining, stays and remains within the confines of the home. Secondly, the ‘creators’ of the male and the female are
separated as “his” and “her” creator. This implies a distinction in the God who created the ‘weak’ female and the ‘strong’ male thereby creating a hierarchy among Gods. It reminds one of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart where the less powerful local Gods don’t stand a chance before the orthodox Christian Gods and the colonizers.

Doubly marginalized, the Indian women exist far below the British colonials and the Indian males. Whatever space has been granted to them, presents them as mere shadows with no identity of their own. Moreover, they are portrayed as content and satisfied with their position. Hamidullah’s wife’s words, “What is to become of all our daughters if men refuse to marry?” (A Passage to India 11) sum up the ‘contentment’ of the Oriental woman. Moreover, Forster does not offer names to the Indian women characters, thereby taking away any chances of an individual identity from them.

Where does the author stand in relation to the representation of the man-woman dichotomy? It appears that Forster overshadows the females through the overwhelming presence of the males and the space allotted to them. However, the British woman occupies more space than her Indian counterpart who is conspicuous by her negation. The British male reigns supreme followed by the British female or the Indian male depending on the social order in force and finally the Indian woman. Brenda R. Silver states: “…in Forster’s novel, where white men speak, white women speak, and Indian men speak, but Indian women remain silent, making the text a paradigm for the complex intersection of racism, colonialism, and sexual inequalities that has consistently worked in Western discourses to erase the other women’s experiences” (89). No clear insight is given if this borders on hatred or pity but one thing is clear that the English women are superior. Forster does not reveal if the British women see their Indian counterparts as ‘evil’ or as ‘ignorant’ but either way Indian women are inferior to them.

Adela and Mrs Moore, as Britishers, emerge clear misfits in the British gender order. This also seems to be the reason why Mrs Moore and Adela fail in their quest to resolve the ‘Indian muddle’. They are the colonizers and as such their ‘role’ is of the governor, somewhat like using ‘force’ with the underlying belief that the Orient is inferior and to be governed. Brenda R. Silver observes that “the threat posed by Adela and Mrs Moore, however differs, for their resistance threatens to destroy the status
quo through intimacy, not hatred” (95). The gender order is based on the principle of binary opposites implying that the masculine cannot be on pleasant terms with the feminine. Mrs Moore and Adela try to supersede this underlying principle but the text does not allow this deviation. As a result Mrs Moore dies on her way back to England while Adela goes back, allegedly molested, dejected and rejected by her prospective husband. Maria M. Davidis, in “Forster’s Imperial Romance: Chivalry, Motherhood and Questing in A Passage to India”, comments on Adela’s ‘molestation’ in the caves: “I read it as a penalty for having refused to operate within the gendered discourses of imperialism…Adela’s plight seems to bear out the Anglo-Indians’ fear of what will occur if their women exceed the bounds of the feminine domestic sphere” (268). Their silencing and inability exemplify the discourse of gender in the text.

On the other hand, Ronny and other bureaucrats persist with India without attempting to resolve the muddle. The discussion that Ronny and Mrs. Moore had following the Bridge Party is a fascinating example of the complications in the context. Mrs. Moore invokes God and asks Ronny to treat Indians better than he does normally. This generates a reaction in Ronny who says, “The sincere but impotent desire wins His blessing” (A Passage to India 52). The discussion between Ronny and Mrs Moore indicates the gulf between the male and the female, especially British. Ronny mocks the faith of Mrs Moore as incompetence, distancing himself as the stronger. At the same time the narrative adds, “…God, but she found him increasingly difficult to avoid as she grew older, but he had been constantly in her thoughts since she entered India, though oddly enough he satisfied her less” (54). His inability to get over God or interpret Him in his own way, and Mrs. Moore’s inability to be satisfied with Him in some way also justifies her failure in resolving the ‘Indian muddle’ and Ronny’s stay in the midst of that ‘muddle’. This use of the Indian ‘muddle’, the unsuccessful attempt to understand it by some and the lack of interest of others in attempting to understand it, reflects what Eward Said believes is “to represent material that according to the canons of the novel form cannot in fact be represented— vastness, incomprehensible creeds, secret motions, histories and social forms” (Culture and Imperialism 214). Forster’s use of his modalities, then, is an attempt to make India legible for the West and placeable in a Western literary mode.
There are also English women characters like Mrs. Turton, caricatures drawn by Forster to ridicule the English aristocracy and their ways. Theirs is a world of illusion woven to counter the hot and dreary life they have in India under their male counterparts. Forster here ridicules the sophisticated British women who attempt to showcase their importance through different activities. Another reference to it is after the Marabar caves incident wherein Mrs. Turton is made to say, “She is my own darling girl” and Forster adds, “…remembering that she had called her “not pukka” and resented her engagement to young Heaslop, she began to cry. Capable of tears—yes, but always reserving them for some adequate occasion, and now it had come” (A Passage to India 199). The narrative seems a parody of women like Mrs. Turton, a type of the aristocratic English female.

The construct of gender, then, broaches the ‘power structures’ practiced in the English society. Adela, who is supposed to marry Ronny, Mrs. Moore and some minor characters like Mrs. Turton and Mrs. Callendar all have different opinions coming from different interpretations of the country. While Mrs. Moore is new she has a romanticized view of the country while Ronny, having been here for some time, has a more materialistic interpretation of the country. However, this difference does not prevent Mrs. Moore from doing as she likes and Ronny acceding to her wishes, though against his will, and not without putting some conditions. Adela, the other lady to have come to India recently, was to marry Ronny but after the tea party at Fielding’s, she tells Ronny that she cannot marry him. But still, the official calling-off happens only once Ronny rejects Adela. Such incidents show the prevailing ‘power structures’ in British society.

Forster’s keenness on displaying the English set up, their way of living and governing is evident. At the same time there is the desire to assert the importance of the British presence in India and their donning the ‘white man’s burden’. Lionel Trilling says: “Dickinson...was not comfortable in India... ‘There is no solution to the problem of governing India,’ he wrote. Our presence is a curse both to them and to us. Our going away will be worse” (137). The Indian ‘muddle’ and the desire to resolve it, all become a part of that justification. Indian spirituality too becomes a part of that muddle for it is incomprehensible and beyond his imagination.
The gender representation, then, revolves primarily around the discourse of power constructed in the text that surrounds the characters and affects their actions. Shikha Misra says: “The two central female characters, Mrs Moore and Adela Quested are delineated in detail—both with their separate approaches to life as a whole and India in particular. But their main part is played out within the patriarchal and imperialist structures of the novel” (57-58). The gendered world in *A Passage to India* offers certain space to the characters and they act within that space. The guiding forces behind this gendered world are two namely, biological male and colonial power, both vested in Forster and both determining the discourse in the text. Benita Parry points out that “praise for *A Passage to India* as a poised and sympathetic account of the sub-continent’s landscape, history, and culture which Indian critics of older generation had offered, has...been repudiated by their descendents as ‘emanating from a colonized consciousness’” (177).

The India of Forster, then, comes across as one where two orders are at play simultaneously: the colonial and the male-female. The British, by virtue of their masculinity and status as colonizers, are the ‘first’ with the Indians subordinate to them. But the other order at work places the Indian male above the British female owing to the former’s masculinity. However, one section that remains marginalized by both the orders alike is the Indian female. The India represented by Forster, thus, has the British male colonizer, the British females, the Indian males and the Indian females. Coloniaally, the British reign, but the social order keeps the man-woman relationship traditional, the male above the female, relegating the Indian female to the bottom.

*Midnight’s Children*, unlike *A Passage to India*, does not dwell centrally on the discourse of racial power but rather represents India from West returned eyes. The critics have asserted that the text is an example of the male hegemony where the female is thoroughly marginalized and negated. Nowhere is she offered a central position in the discourse. “Women have fixed me all right, but perhaps they were never central...they always made me a little afraid” (*Midnight’s Children* 266). Women have given Saleem ‘birth’, be it Mary, Jamila or Parvati but they, according to his own convictions, have not been central to his life and existence. This is in conformity with the concept of the traditional woman, the ‘creator’ but not
dominating or controlling her creation. Rushdie’s women fall in this category as the creators and sacrificers or schemers repenting later but never ‘central’ to the male’s life, nor central to the text, always taking a position on the periphery. Charu Verma, in her analysis categorizes the text as ‘sexist’ questioning the absence of the story of Padma, the dung-Goddess.

The female characters in the text conform to the concept of the traditional Indian woman. Naseem, as long as she is unmarried is not shown ‘completely’ to the doctor but the affected part shown through a hole. Amina too, as long as unmarried, is offered a marginal space in the narrative. This reflects the traditional Indian idea of not exposing the unwed daughters to the eyes of men. Moreover, the saving of Lifafa Das by Amina again asserts the ‘motherly’ character of women. Whether this portrayal presents the woman as the ‘other’ or not, she is still the classical Indian woman. Nalini Natarajan says: “Women as spectacle of motherhood once again evokes dreams of unity and wholeness...How does the figure of Mother cement nation? She suggests common mythic origins. Like the land (she gives shelter and ‘bears’), she is eternal, patient, essential” (83).

The same conclusion has been drawn from another perspective. Saleem has controlled the life of India, mother India. “…my fate was linked by my birthday to that of the nation, and the father of the nation was Nehru. Nehru’s death; can I avoid the conclusion that that, too, was all my fault?” (Midnight’s Children 387). Saleem holds himself responsible for the major events that take place in independent India and some in Pakistan as well. By virtue of being born at the stroke of midnight, his life is intertwined with that of the nation and in laying the ‘blame’ on himself for the events he is ‘centralizing’ himself in the narrative. He proposes his position at the centre of the text rather than allocating that space to ‘India’, the country. The text is ‘his’ story hence he becomes the ‘cult figure’ reducing everyone else in comparison. Saleem thereby becomes the masculine, the dominant, in relation to ‘others’.

As regards the basic man-woman status, the text follows the traditional notion of the masculine and the feminine.

This mother, who had spent her life housebound, in purdah, had suddenly found enormous strength and gone out to run the small
gemstone business (turquoises, rubies, diamonds) which had put Aadam through medical college, with the help of a scholarship; so he returned to find the seemingly immutable order of his family turned upside down, his mother going out to work while his father sat hidden behind the veil which the stroke had dropped over his brain...in a wooden chair, in a darkened room, he sat and made bird-noises. (Midnight's Children 7)

Aadam’s mother, owing to the illness of her husband, runs the entire business going out and meeting people and to be able to do so she requires “enormous strength”. This reflects the normal status of women in a traditional Muslim household where it is the male who looks after the ‘out of home’ work while women are supposed to stay indoors as men are not allowed to even ‘behold’ them with their eyes. The order remains the same with the next generation when the wife of Aadam says to him, “You want me to walk naked in front of strange men” (Midnight’s Children 38). This is in reply to Aadam’s request to Naseem to give up purdah. Naseem is unwilling to give up purdah because it is equivalent to being ‘naked’ for her and she is not “any...bad word woman” (38).

A perspective on Midnight’s Children is that it is a male colonial discourse. Sanghari says, “…female-ness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed; one has to be able to see the formation of female-ness in each and every form at a given moment or in later interpretations, and see what it is composed of,...what its freedoms may be?” (qtd in Rajan 123). A number of critics have pointed out that this creation of ‘female-ness’ is highly traditional, with secondary status offered to women; as the narration prioritizes a ‘male colonial discourse’.

However, the concept of gender in the text can be evaluated at more levels than this. One primary gendered device in the text is the purdah. At the surface level, it reflects the mindset of a traditional Indian woman. ‘Purdah’ becomes Rushdie’s symbol of the traditional and the feminine as against the modernity of Aadam Aziz, the West returned Doctor. As Nalini Natarajan says: “The woman’s covering is a sign of orthodox values...” (80). The purdah reflects the ‘power structures’ at home. The norm demands the male to work outside and have his way with the wife owing to his masculinity, while the lady, the feminine, to obey and stay back home. The ‘enormous
strength' required by the female to go out indicates the magnitude of such a change in the gender structure thereby revealing a 'proper' order at home.

Secondly, the purdah also reflects the difference between the West and the Orient. Aadam, the West returned, cannot comprehend the situation and the need for purdah, but the native Mohammaden mindset cannot imagine survival without one of the most revered things in its faith, the purdah. The conflict between the West and the traditional Muslim mind is clearly visible in the narrative.

However, the purdah goes beyond this traditionalism and the subjugation of the female expression. The purdah between Aadam and Naseem when the former visits her as a doctor serves a very important purpose as it brings about their marriage, which starts the Sinai dynasty. In the beginning when Aadam returns from Germany, he is called in by landowner Ghani to cure his daughter. He is given a glimpse of the 'ailling' part of Naseem through a small hole in a sheet that acts as the purdah. “In those years, you see, the landowner’s daughter Naseem Ghani contracted quite extraordinary number of minor illnesses...and on each occasion he was vouchsafed a glimpse, through the mutilated sheet, of a different seven-inch circle of the young woman’s body” (Midnight's Children 25).

It gives visibility to the otherwise invisible female. Had Naseem been brought before Aadam fully without the Purdah, probably the desire in him would not have been evoked and she would have disappeared from the text. The presence of the purdah between the two offers her a permanent space in the text. Neil Ten Kortenaar, in “Postcolonial Ekphrasis: Salman Rushdie gives the Finger Back to the Empire”, opines, “Had Aadam Aziz been given complete access to the patient, she would have remained metaphorically invisible: he might never have seen her as more than a patient” (239). The entire purdah episode becomes an instrument to make the female visible in an otherwise male hegemonic set-up.

This display of ‘parts’ of Naseem makes the young doctor think about her and eventually he falls in love with Naseem. “So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts. This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams...she accompanied him on all his rounds, she moved into the front room of his
mind…” (Midnight’s Children 26). The purdah, thus, becomes a symbol, not of the ‘invisibility’ of the female but of her visibility. The purdah performs a function opposite to its traditional job of ‘hiding the female’. Aadam, in the process liberates her from behind the sheet and offers her a space outside it.

The presence of the purdah between Aadam and Naseem lays the foundation of their marriage, planned cleverly by the blind Ghani. Neil Ten Kortenaar observes: “Held up as an imperfect veil before the young and ostensibly sick Naseem Ghani when Dr Aadam Aziz is called by her father to examine her, the sheet functions as a motor of desire much more successful than if the daughter were fully accessible or if she were fully hidden” (“Postcolonial Ekphrasis…” 239).

The hole in the purdah that serves as the window to examine the ailing part of Naseem also becomes a means of projecting the dormant desire in Aadam for the female. The fact that the object of desire lies hidden partially gives fire to that dormant desire. Neil Ten Kortenaar adds, “The bedsheets with the hole is also a screen onto which the young doctor is invited to project his desire…” (239). But an important issue is that the ‘visibility’ offered to the female by the purdah is limited to sexuality. In other words, the purdah makes her only a projection of the male desire which she has roused by her ‘bits and pieces’. It is still the male who dictates the terms and this is amply revealed when the sheet is used as the nuptial bed and ‘drops of blood’ fall on it symbolizing that the desire has been gratified on the object of desire. As Kortenaar maintains, “Aadam Aziz, standing before the bedsheets with the hole, may appear to occupy the position of the triumphant desiring male. The artist before the canvas is figured as male, and the other behind the sheet, who can only be glimpsed in fragments and must be imagined, is inevitably a woman. She will be seen, can only be seen, as a projection of male desire…it has done service on Aadam Aziz and Naseem Ghani’s nuptial bed and is now written on in blood” (“Postcolonial Ekphrasis…” 246). The blood is an assertion of the male capacity to write on the ‘blank’ female.

The hole in the sheet also resembles the ‘hole’ in Aadam Aziz when he returns from Germany. The ‘bits and pieces’ of the Orient that he eyes on his return disillusion him with a ‘God in whose existence he could not totally disbelieve”. The hole created in him then, makes him “vulnerable to women…” (Midnight’s Children 4). The blood
that oozes from his nose, while praying, bears affinity to the blood on the bedsheet. Aadam, is thus a victim of the bedsheets, rather than its owner. He writes over the female blankness with her blood but at the same time, the very rousing of his desire on seeing bits of Naseem, reflects the curse of the hole within him that leaves him prey to the female. He is a prey to the 'hole' and emerges as the 'oppressed oppressor', one who has no other alternative but to impose himself on the women he is associated with. As Kortenaar says: “Aadam Aziz always remained ‘the sheet’s victim’” (“Postcolonial Ekphrasis...” 246). Saleem, Aadam and the masculine characters in the narrative, as a result emerge as victims of a gendered social order that governs their actions: they are all victims of the ‘bedsheet’. In other words, they have no other way to act than the one they do. The insistence of Aadam that Naseem give up the *purdah* is his attempt to dislodge that traditional order, like a post-colonial artist.

Being Post-colonial, Aadam, Saleem and Rushdie, don’t feel at home with the traditional legacies which become a symbol of the colonial order in India. But Naseem, on the other hand, is untouched by the Western influence and post-coloniality, she being the housewife has no desire to be devoid of the *purdah*. At the same time, however, Aadam’s inability to fill his inner hole owing to his Oriental roots does not allow him to completely discard the *purdah*, the religious symbol of the Muslim female. As a result he is not able to convince her to abandon it. But he can command his wife at will and ‘write’ on the bedsheets with her own blood. In other words, he can still command her sexually. Teresa Heffernan opines: “Thus Aadam, actively involved in the liberation struggle against the paternal colonial order, is still free to command his wife to perform sexually” (484). Aadam and Saleem the narrator are both subject to the social order that is gendered allowing more space to the masculine than to the feminine. They attempt to break free of this restriction but cannot as these forces bind them more strongly than their desire to break free. It is, therefore, not the male hegemonic discourse of Rushdie, but a representation of the social order that does not permit an individual to rise above it. Kortenaar comments: “The postcolonial writer stands between European text and local context, neither one nor the other, and yet partaking of both” (Kortenaar, “Postcolonial Ekphrasis...” 241).
Rushdie's use of such a narrative technique questions the gendered order prevalent in the society. His is an attempt that challenges the dominant art forms, including literature that do not evaluate the gendered orders at play in a set-up. He creates a gendered order in *Midnight's Children* where the characters, both male and female, enact their roles. In the backdrop of this, the male and female characters have little choice but to be the oppressor and the oppressed respectively. It is a set-up where the male attempts to overrule his masculinity by questioning the order, thereby affirming his status as the feminine in it. Samir Dayal, in "The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie's *Shame*", opines, "...masculinity cannot imagine itself without feminizing itself, or threatening masculinity itself..." (47). It is an example of the male self-deconstruction, as Dayal calls it, where Rushdie questions the binary construction of the masculine and feminine into the male and the female, something quite “unmanlike”, and “unbecoming” of man.

Another example of the gendered social order may be seen in the treatment of Saleem and his sister. "...hapless poor relations of the great Zulfikars...The Monkey, however, gave every appearance of enjoying herself...perhaps my sister had an intuition of her fate; perhaps she knew the transformation which lay in store for her...Emerald Zulfikar would descend on her with callous elegance, demanding, 'Come on, Jamila, don't sit there like a melon, sing us a song like any good girl would!'" (*Midnight's Children* 407). The lines throw light on the representation of gender by Rushdie. Saleem Sinai and his sister are both ‘hapless’ and hence dependent on the Zulfikars. They become the feminine, irrespective of their biological sex, the ‘poor relations’ relying on their ‘superiors’ for survival. Power and money determine the gender here. “Relatives”, ‘equal’ by birth, but because one has more money and power than the ‘other’, makes them the ‘first among equals’, irrespective of biological distinctions.

Looking at it from the traditional male-female perspective, the status of the female remains subordinate to that of the male. "...my sister had an intuition of her fate..." and hence, Jamila, unlike Saleem, “gave every appearance of enjoying herself” which Saleem ‘could hardly believe’. The narrative throws light on the social division of gender, wherein women are at the bottom of the hierarchy and hence can be ‘descended upon’ callously because they are only a thing working at the whims of
their superiors who happen to be masculine. Jamila is supposed to do what the Zulfikars expect her to do or she will be labeled a ‘melon’. Saleem however escapes this domination by being let alone by the wealthy and powerful Zulfikars. The escape routes and the desires of the female are also drowned in the rush of the occasion. “...although she protested with the sullen clumsiness of fourteen-year-olds, she was hauled unceremoniously...she looked as if she wished the floor would open up beneath her feet, she clasped her hands together; seeing no escape, the Monkey began to sing” (Midnight’s Children 407-408). Her unconscious desire to become a Sita, the ideal Indian woman, to escape from the clutches of gender is explored by Rushdie in the narrative. Incidentally, the person who pushes her to this extreme is her aunt, the economically powerful, but subordinate to her husband. Again, the secondary status of women is exposed. Jamila’s wish to have “the floor...open up beneath her feet” shows her sense of anguish when forced to sing but she has ‘no escape’, something which Sita of The Ramayana had. The bane of mortality has come between her and her salvation, something which the legendary Indian heroine escaped. Trapped in this dual state of minority, of being poor and a woman, the Monkey, as per the dictates of the Zulfikars, became Jamila Singer.

The incident reflects the mindset of the female, made persistently aware of her social status as twice inferior, monetarily and biologically. Jamila is well aware of her status and hence she “gave every appearance of enjoying herself” and says, “It’s my duty...” (Midnight’s Children 407). A combination of ‘innocence’ and ‘experience’ regarding gender is given in the narrative here as she “protested with the sullen clumsiness of fourteen-year-olds...” (407). This denotes ‘innocence’ where momentarily she believes in the existence of an escape route. This innocence is unlike the innocence found in Blake’s Songs of Innocence in that Blake’s innocence is of ignorance while that of Jamila is of being misinformed. However, experience takes its place quickly and she realizes her situation of no escape and ‘gets along’ with what she is asked to do.

The difference in the treatment meted out to Saleem and Jamila by the Zulfikars amply points at the role of gender in the society. Saleem, the male, is let alone to do and deal with things himself while the female, Jamila, is moulded into an object of gratification by the Zulfikars. Though the gratification is not physical but sensory,
pertaining to the sense of hearing, nevertheless she becomes a source of pleasure for the society. Connell says: "...men believe that women who are dependent on them must be their property – to discard if they wish, to kill if need be” (2). Jamila, the woman, is ‘used’ to serve the purpose of ‘society’, the role she is ‘naturally expected to perform’ while Saleem is not disturbed as his role as the ‘masculine’ is not of being dominated but of dominating the feminine.

Her awareness swiftly gains the knowledge of her illusion and acquaints her with reality wherein she is twice oppressed and hence ‘voiceless’. This ‘voicelessness’ stays with her even when she gains the status of the star singer of Pakistan. The Burqa offered to her acts as the symbol of her voicelessness and lack of identity. No one knows what she looks like and no one has seen her. Ironically, she is identified by her ‘voice’ only. The narrative here divides ‘voice’ into two, first, the one that represents expression and second, the melody that pleases others. Jamila, the poor woman, can get over the tag of the ‘poor’ but will still remain the feminine owing to her femaleness. Her task is to please, and as a singer she is doing exactly the same. She cannot refuse the masculine, hence she becomes Jamila Singer, ‘serving’ the masculine with her voice.

Her projection as the ‘subject’ of the male desires and a source of their gratification amply reflects the social order and its division of male and female. Jamila, the female, has to serve the men, not physically but with her voice. Again the purdah comes to the fore. Her melodious voice acts as the purdah and she hides behind that offering her voice as a ‘sight’ to men. That she arouses desires is evident from the fact that she is a successful singer in Pakistan. Her Purdah is without the hole and hence the physical aspect is missing but the pleasure principle as well as its gratification is equally valid for Jamila, the singer.

The only male she can and does refuse is her brother who entertains incestuous feelings for her. He is just like her, ‘poor’, and by her ‘success’ as a singer she rises above him in status. But she can’t be vociferous about it because he is still the masculine and hence above her. However, owing to the fact that incest is seen as a cultural taboo restrains the author from being explicit about it and ‘allows’ Jamila to refuse her brother. Saleem’s incestuous feelings for his sister must bring ‘shame’ in the cultural context of the novel. In spite of being masculine his feelings for his sister
cannot be materialized due to the social and moral restrictions and any such deviation, if it occurs, would be highly scandalous. The ‘victory’ of Jamila, the feminine, over the masculine Saleem, thus, owes to the supremacy of the social order over the individual.

The novel covers a time span of several decades. It is equally pertinent to see how the gender order changes with time. It is significant to note that over time gender and its use does not undergo a drastic change. Saleem says, “Padma, by proposing a marriage, revealed her willingness to dismiss everything I’ve told her about my past as just so much ‘fancy talk’;…” (Midnight’s Children 621). This attribute of Padma to ‘dismiss’ everything is reminiscent of the traditional Indian woman who has to remain in secondary position in relation to the male. The issue of ‘choice’ never or rarely ever occurs to her as she is the passive one in the gender hierarchy. Padma herself offers to marry Saleem but then this is not so much a consequence of her authority as her ‘social sense of shame’. The narrator says, “I must at once record that our dung-lotus has proposed marriage, ‘so that I can look after you without going to shame in the eyes of the world’” (Midnight’s Children 620).

Padma wants a ‘social promotion’, from being a wanton lady with a man to becoming his dutiful and legal partner which is possible only through marriage. This ‘promotion’ will grant social acceptance to her relationship with Saleem. Her desire to ‘rise’ in the social hierarchy is representative of the feminine desire to prevail upon the masculine, the male. But the fact remains that even with marriage her gender status will remain below that of the male. It is just that she will be adhering to the social norms, a social force that showcases its larger strength on both the male and the female. It does not matter if Saleem has had illegitimate affairs, it does not matter to Saleem if he is staying with Padma outside marriage, all this can go under the carpet as ‘fancy talk’. But things are different with Padma and hence the proposal for marriage. As Uma Chakravarti opines: “Many castes practice hypergamy where a lower caste woman is married to a higher caste man, enabling the woman’s caste to move up gradually in the hierarchy” (85).

The insistence of Padma to marry Saleem momentarily turns the gender order upside down as the female gets authoritative while the male is skeptical and uncertain. The female dons the mantle of the masculine by becoming assertive and demanding, while
the male becomes submissive, feminine, for he is unwilling to commit and decide. Saleem says, “I have been protesting like a blushing virgin:...” (Midnight’s Children 620). This swap of the gender roles, however, is a temporary phase which won’t and cannot last.

Such a defiant attempt is seen earlier in the character of the ‘Widow’. She symbolizes the ‘fear’ of women entering into the periphery of masculinity disrupting the social order. She offers a combination of the fear of ill-omen attached to a Hindu widow and the fear of a castrating mother figure. As a ‘widow’ she stands in contrast to the Indian woman, chaste and pious, to be averted from the masculine gaze, while as the dominant leader she is in contrast to the protective and creative mother. Allegorizing Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of the country and the imposer of Emergency on the country to retain power, she stands in contrast to the ideal Indian woman just as Priya in The Great Indian Novel. While Tharoor nails Priya as dependent on the male, Rushdie leaves the debate open in the midst of her authority. As Nandini Bhattacharaya says:

...in Midnight’s Children where a real historical figure, Indira Gandhi, or the Widow as she is called in the novel and her protégées like son Sanjay and Major Shiva, weave patterns of dominance and control to lead people into land of perpetual midnight. In the figure of the Widow, Rushdie combines the abstract fear of the fascist with the particular Indian (Hindu) anxiety about the ill-omened woman whose husband is dead and more specifically the fear of the castrating mother figure (3).

Samir Dayal asserts in “The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie’s Shame”, “The articulation of gender relations that challenge hegemonic, patriarchal traditions is necessary for the kind of (sub) versive ‘production’ of the postcolonial subject...that Rushdie undertakes...” (45). The Widow, thus, with her masculinity, is a symbol of the female resistance to the social order.

More than generating a male or a female discourse, Rushdie has constructed a discourse that places the characters in a gendered society where both the males and the females are oppressed by the social order. The females jostle for a space in a set-
up that ‘marks’ them as the feminine while the males fight against an imposed masculinity and the role of oppressor. It is a post-colonial work of art by a liberal according to Gayatri Spivak. The females, though passive and marginalized, wage a fight through Naseem with her purdah, and the Widow. Spivak in an interview states: “...woman...is a muted person who is simply a discursive space, but she has organized a collective resistance” (Najmabadi 134). The male, on the other hand, is the one who has to be central in the gendered society and hence the women are not allowed greater space than the male. Spivak further says: “Rushdie has always wanted to insert the question of woman in his books. But even as I acknowledge this, and want to praise it, I think one must see this as a failed attempt” (Najmabadi 133).

The representation of gender in the text centers on the idea of a gendered social set-up in which the males and the females are placed in a pre-defined space. Oppressed, both stage their struggle against this established order questioning its legitimacy. In the struggle, owing to the prevalent set-up, the male emerges as an entity dominating the female. Teresa Heffeman says that it is “impossible to accommodate women” (485) in the narrative but the post-colonial overtones ensure that the unhappiness of the male about this ‘forced dominance’ is reflected.

The India of Rushdie, then, emerges as partially post-colonial as the traditional gender order is challenged to some extent. The social stratification is traditional with the male prevailing over the female and having the ‘capacity’ to write over the ‘blank’ female. But what makes Rushdie’s India question the colonial notions is the displeasure of the male to be a part of the prevailing social order. The Sexuality of Aadam, exposed through the “perforated sheet” and the ‘hole’ in Aadam Aziz that “makes him vulnerable to women” push India towards that order that will question the ‘gendered social order’. The male in Rushdie’s India, hence, emerges as equally the feminine as the female in a masculine social order; he emerges as the oppressed oppressor.

Like Midnight’s Children, The Great Indian Novel is also composed in English by an expatriate. Assessing the representation of gender in the novel, the critics have generally argued two issues: First, the marginal representation of women and second, the colonial picture of India which even the Mahabharata cannot neutralize. The status of women is revealed in the text early on. “Hindus were not wedded to
monogamy in those days, indeed that barbarism would come only after independence” (The Great Indian Novel 26). A little later V.V., the narrator, adds:

In our heritage there are many ways in which a girl can be given away. Our ancient texts tell us that a daughter may be presented, finely adorned and laden with dowry, to an invited guest; or exchanged for an appropriate number of cows; or allowed to choose her own mate in a swayamvara ceremony...In olden times girls were given to Brahmins as gifts, to assist them in the performance of their rites and rituals. But in all our sacred books the greatest praise attaches to the marriage of a girl seized by force from a royal assembly. (26-27).

The entire representation of Indian women has been squeezed into these lines in the narrative and the women characters in the novel largely remain confined to this parameter. Looking at this it seems that a woman has been consistently and constantly depicted as the ‘other’ and the male as the ‘self’ and the gender order is the orthodox one where the masculine dominates the feminine.

This attitude towards women, prevalent since the time of ancient history, has been analyzed and related to the sex differences in brain functioning. Stephen M. Whitehead says: “In recent decades, researchers into the biological basis of gender have attempted to prove sex differences in brain functioning; [it is] suggest[ed] that all sexual behaviour can be reduced to a ‘sperm war’...human psychology [is] deeply inscribed [in] cultural, gendered behaviours and attitudes rooted in the Pleistocene; an inevitable ‘human psychological architecture’” (11). The ‘human psychological architecture’ is culturally determined and found in the traditional attitudes. Different ways of marrying a girl succinctly described by Tharoor in his novel reflect it. The female, the ‘other’, has no opinion and is just a passive participant in the ‘gendered behaviour’.

Tharoor refers to monogamy as ‘barbarism’ and India has been categorized as essentially polygamous but there is no reference to polyandry, except the one where Kunti asks the Pandavas to evenly share Draupadi among themselves. However, the ease with which polygamy is accepted, polyandry is not. Kunti says, “Share whatever you have brought amongst the five of you – equally” (The Great Indian Novel 314).
The statement rakes up a trouble and the narrator is called in, who says, “There’s nothing in the Vedas that would sanction one woman marrying several husbands...I am inclined to think our traditions would tolerate the second option (of polyandry rather than the first which is breaking a vow made to a parent) more easily than the first” (315).

The issues of polygamy and polyandry can be analyzed at two levels. First, the issues of polygamy and polyandry are actually dealt with in the Vedas and the ancient Indian sacred texts, and secondly, they are not dealt with in these books and the author has incorporated them in his work. In either case, surprisingly, women remain at the margin of the society. Considering the first case that the issues have been actually dealt with in the Indian sacrosanct texts, it appears that it is lopsided in favour of men. Women have no say in it and have to abide by the texts which are highly masculine and androcentric. The Vedas reveal so much about how a lady can be won over and accepts polygamy but has nothing to offer on polyandry which is acceptable only if something momentous is at stake. Gisela Brinker Gabler and Sidonie Smith assert in “Introduction: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in the New Europe”, “…these forms of prerogative power ‘construct and reinforce male dominance across the social order…” (Smith 14).

Looking at the second opinion, namely, that the author has constructed the image in his fiction, some serious biases emerge. The narrator says that ‘polygamy’ has been the norm for centuries. The idea of monogamy as ‘barbarism’ is shown as the binary negative of polygamy, something that ‘has always been there’ in India but battered to death by the Britishers. Tharoor has tried to portray the Indian woman within this framework. Another aspect of this ancient traditional culture is the ways in which a woman can be ‘given away’ to a man. Several ways of doing this are suggested and quite clearly none of the proposed options keep women at the centre. Even where she has a preference, it is the man who gives her preference to choose. The woman, as a result, remains the ‘other’ in the traditional Indian set-up. According to Mirjana Morokvasic, “…women are those who suffer most from this treatment by the state, whether directly or indirectly” (qtd. in Smith 15).

The second argument of critics assessing the gender representation in The Great Indian Novel is that the text presents a gloomy picture of India which even the
’presence’ of the *Mahabharata* cannot dispel. The Epic, one of the two greatest in Indian literary and cultural history, symbolizes an alternative order of perfect morality and righteousness but it does not succeed in changing the tone of the novel projecting India as corrupt and decayed. This portrayal corroborates the representation of the Orient by the West as the ‘other’, the feminine. G. R. Taneja opines: “Tharoor’s dual interpretation denies us the comfort of the moral universe of the *Mahabharata*” (771).

In other words, the values and principles of the times of the *Mahabharata*, which are seen as timeless, are questioned by Tharoor. As G. R. Taneja adds, “A convincing unraveling of recent history makes credible his questioning of the values that remain embedded in the epic and have been revered since time immemorial...The disenchantment with the inherited world order leads Tharoor to cast a shadow of doubt upon the very foundations of ancient wisdom enshrined in the *Mahabharata*” (771).

However, assessing the gender order, some more things emerge. The representation of women in the text reflects their marginalization in the society. The characters of Gandhari, Draupadi and Kunti are shadowed by their more powerful male counterparts like Dhritrashtra and the Pandavas. Moreover, they are satisfied with their role as the ‘other’ and so stay in the background. *The Mahabharata* sees the likes of Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi in a positive light and so does Tharoor, in his *The Great Indian Novel*. As Jayatri Ghosh says in “Satyavati: The Matriarch of the *Mahabharata*”: “We find in Mahabhartian society not only extraordinary men but also women of exceptional character, whose strength has few parallels, even in liberal twentieth century. Women like Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi stand out, sometimes opposing the injustice of the male world, sometimes determined to claim their rights even while remaining under male authority...” (33).

One character that seems to be questioning this order is Priya Durtyodhini. She emerges as the symbol of Tharoor’s questioning of the traditional order of society as she is the most resistant to the ‘normal order’ of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ thereby becoming the ‘Matriarch’. Priya, the daughter of the blind Dhritrashtra and blindfold Gandhari, learns her lessons early from what she sees happen to her mother. Gandhari is conveniently treated as the ‘other’ by Dhritrashtra, busy in politics, and wielding power. “After what she saw in her childhood Priya Duryodhini would never be able to
trust another human being, no, not even – especially not – her own father” (*The Great Indian Novel* 152). Priya learns quickly that being the ‘other’ will relegate her like her mother, to the background, hence she becomes a rebel. She rises to the post of Prime Minister of the country and gives ample evidence of her iron fist through the emergency. She is the only woman to escape the ‘otherness’ but at what cost? In her single minded ambition towards power, she almost identifies with the Marlowian protagonists, lusting for power at all costs.

Her character is a rebellion against the ‘otherness’ to which women have been subject through the ages. This ‘emancipated character’ in the midst of traditional woman characters should have a purpose. The Indian political history has seen in Indira Gandhi, the actual figure allegorized by Priya in the novel, one of the most dominant and authoritative figures. No one matches her in terms of her determination and authority. She stands as a symbol of the ‘new woman’, the one who is not fettered by the shackles of traditionalism but rather makes every attempt to break free. Such portrayal of Priya Duryodhini (Indira Gandhi) by Tharoor has two major reasons. First, historical necessity makes Indira Gandhi’s presence pertinent as she is one character who simply cannot be ignored. She, in history, stands as a symbol of the modern woman, a woman who asserts her ‘self’. “Priya Duryodhini acted only according to the dictates of her own conscienceless mind” (*The Great Indian Novel* 155). Secondly, in a work of art and fiction, she questions the tradition that classifies woman as the ‘other’. Priya is the symbol of the emancipated woman in post-independence India. But she is faced with many obstacles and the route she takes to reach her destination is full of thorns and she knows it well. As a result she sticks to power, not abandoning it from her clutches. Her character also reveals that the course to transform into the ‘self’ is not easy.

But Priya does not have complete freedom of an emancipated woman. Her failure to kill Bhim as a child and her dependence on Shakuni during the emergency restrict her stature as an emancipated woman. Thus, she partially remains within the boundaries of conventionalism and traditionalism, but she certainly has an edge over all other female characters in the novel. Even though she is still on the periphery of the mainstream society she shows her assertiveness and consciously tries to occupy greater space in the social order.
But owing to her actions, she emerges as a ‘negative’ force. This can be attributed to the fact that she insists on departing from the established norms of the traditional Indian woman of the Golden age of India, the one idealized in the text. She, hence, cannot be a successful leader and her eventual failure indicates this. Her inability to break free from the shackles of tradition and her representation as the ‘matriarch’, a ‘negative’ force, shows a celebration of the male Hindu mindset which asserts that the female is subordinate to the male. Kanishka Chowdhury observes: “Tharoor’s project…sadly enacts the erasure of the subaltern or the underclass” (43).

The male, as in *The Mahabharata*, does not show any signs of unhappiness at his role in the social order, unlike in *Midnight’s Children* where the male becomes a part of the ‘oppressed’ in the social order. In other words, the representation of the male is not that of a socially bound masculine. On the contrary, as the masculine he takes pride in the subordination of the female. The following quote reflects the ‘otherness’ of women and its celebration by the masculine, “But in all our sacred books the greatest praise attaches to the marriage of a girl seized by force from a royal assembly” (*The Great Indian Novel* 27). The height of valor and pride is in ‘seizing’ a girl ‘by force’. The woman becomes a ‘subject’ for the masculine who can handle her with “force”. As Gabler and Smith assert in “Introduction: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in the New Europe”, “…they [women] are exploited through the...marriage bureau” (Smith 16).

The social order in *The Great Indian Novel*, like most social orders is gendered but female struggle is the odd one out here as males are not a part of it. The male sits pretty as he has no “hole” to cover up, as Aadam in *Midnight’s Children* has. As a result, he does not strive for a change of the social order. Hence, the female is offered little space outside the *purdah*, signifying a patriarchal social order.

This representation of the female is of a piece with the representation of the ‘ideal Indian woman’ under the aegis of Hinduism. *Manusmriti*, one of the sacrosanct Hindu texts, the law book, at one place says that the female should live under the father, husband and the son. Moreover, it also attaches praise to the ‘homely’ woman as divine and one who brings good fortune and prosperity. Tharoor’s representation of women caters to these conventional Hindu notions of womanhood and society. Kanishka Chowdhury says: “As a westernized middle-class Hindu, he is unable to get
beyond the habitual preoccupations of his class” (44). The ideal woman characters are the likes of Draupadi, Gandhari and Kunti while characters like Priya are shown to be ‘negative’.

Tharoor does not “recover” the history of the marginalized and the silenced class, in this case women. Edward Said, in “Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations” opines that “contemporary postcolonial literature “expresses ideas, values, emotions formerly suppressed, ignored or denigrated by, and of course in, the well known metropolitan centers” (1). Tharoor, however, does not express the “ideas, values and emotions” of the suppressed and the marginalized.

The issue of gender extends beyond the male-female dichotomy to the masculine-feminine where again the representation does not delve into the issue of a gendered society as is the case in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Rather, the masculine’s suppression of the feminine emerges as a natural and rightful phenomenon. One example where the masculine derives pleasure at the cost of the marginalized is the case of Pandu. Pandu, the son of Ambalika and Ved Vyas, is Subhash Chander Bose of modern India. Pandu, in the text, is in conflict with the Kaurava party and Gangaji. He stays with Gangaji and the Kaurava party till Gangaji openly declares Dhritarashtra as his successor to the Kaurava party. “And so Ganga,…anointed Dhritarashtra as his successor...It was at this point that Pandu, who had disdained the cause but came to the ashram out of loyalty to the Mahaguru, walked out, never to return to his teacher’s side” (*The Great Indian Novel* 121). The treatment meted out to Pandu in the text clearly underlines his status as the ‘other’ in relation to Gangaji and the Kaurava Party.

Pandu, with his different views on the means to attain independence as well as governance of the party, remains a part of it as long as he consents to Gangaji as the leader and acts as per his instructions. His status is reduced to the ‘other’ when he abandons the party but neither Gangaji nor anyone else in the party supports him as Gangaji’s presence looms large. Pandu exiles himself and dies in an air crash, going into oblivion quietly without raising many eyebrows. Gangaji’s stature as the ‘self’ of India and the independence movement becomes explicit with this and the fact that all other things are to be defined in relation to him. The disappearance of Pandu reflects his ‘femininity’ and ‘otherness’ to the ‘self’ who happens to be Gangaji.
In the presence of the ‘self’, survival for the ‘other’ comes with the unquestioning acceptance of what the ‘self’ does. Dhritarashtra’s deference to the Mahaguru eventually makes him the President of the Kaurava party and later on, after independence, the Prime Minister of the country. On the other hand Pandu, the one who tries to break the convention by going against Gangaji is relegated into oblivion. It shows how the ‘self’ dominates and expects others to act according to him. Dhritarashtra agrees with all that Mahaguru has to say and hence remains his favorite. Pandu’s problem begins with his disagreement with the Mahaguru and ends with his departure from the Kaurava party and eventually, his tragic death. Pandu’s “resistance disrupted the social norm and brought…nothing but trouble and unhappiness” (Dasgupta Madhusraba 51).

Eklavya’s story reflects the same as he attempts to disrupt the norm which pushes him into oblivion and disaster. In fact, there is no ‘voice’ of these two characters in the novel as any attempt to raise it is stifled like ‘herstory’. Pandu and the likes of Eklavya are silenced in the narrative to ensure a homogeneous order, in this case the monopoly of the Mahaguru and the Indian National Congress in the Independence struggle. The presence of Pandu and Eklavya in the narrative would have caused a serious conflict in the homogeneous order of the ‘self’. Their disappearance, hence, becomes inevitable as the orthodox Hindu set-up cannot accommodate such ‘deviant, marginal, threatening, or unimportant’ elements. As a result they are negated from the text. For Bakhtin, a writer distances himself from his work and speaks through language. Tharoor visibly is unable to alienate himself from the work and his text speaks of his orthodox Hindu mind at work. Kanishka Chowdhury asserts: “He [Tharoor] cannot create a new master narrative” because his “voice is inevitably caught up in silencing those who are less fortunate” (43).

Moreover, Gangaji’s character too does not come across as the ideal. His failure to prevent partition and his dying confession, “I...have...failed” (The Great Indian Novel 234) speaks for his character. Where does Gangaji fail? Does he fail in his vow, the very vow which makes him powerful in spite of giving up power and authority, or does he fail to live up to the authority that power such as his gives? Gangaji, a part of the modern social order, is represented as shrewd by nature. He attempts to be the
masculine, the governor, of the ‘others’; nowhere does he attempt to question the prevalent social order, rather he tries to be the ‘first’, the masculine in that order and to establish ‘his truth’ in the narrative. But this ideology of Gangaji, of regarding himself superior to the institution itself, is not acceptable to the Hindu mind, and this is symbolized in his killing. The killing of Gangaji as well as the glory brought to bear on Shikhandin in the act of killing, thus, reflects the orthodox Hindu ideology.

His character allegorizes Bhishma of The Mahabharata who lived in the satayuga. Gangaji, the modern equivalent of Bhishma, ries celibacy like his counterpart but does not and cannot succeed because Tharoor’s India is in contrast to the India of The Mahabharata. As for any devout caste Hindu, Tharoor’s Ram Rajya lies in the satayuga and not in the present. As a result, Gangaji has to be the ‘flawed Maharuru’, in contrast to Bhishma. In place of re-establishing the national heritage and native idioms, Tharoor creates a discourse that acknowledges the loss of Indian ‘paradise’ and affirms it by contrasting it with The Mahabharata.

Gangaji’s failure affirms the claim of Tharoor that India is a “highly developed one [country] in an advanced state of decay” (The Great Indian Novel 1). The zenith of the Indian civilization was in the satayuga, the age of Bhishma and The Mahabharata and it cannot be emulated today when everything is corrupt and rotten. Kanishka Chowdhury opines that Tharoor has “nostalgia for the past, a past when India was the ‘land of Rama,…the land where truth and honour and valour and dharma were worshipped as the cardinal principles of existence...’” (44). The novel is thus, Tharoor’s confession of the golden era of India that is irretrievably lost. Instead of repairing the legacies damaged by colonialism, he is representing a colonial picture of India, an Oriental image. Rather than questioning the ‘moral world of the Mahabharata’, as many critics have asserted, The Great Indian Novel, on the contrary idealizes that order and the impossibility of its retrieval in the present times.

The representation of gender, thus, is dominated by the Hindu male point-of-view which subordinates the female and the feminine as the ‘other’ and broods over the lost Golden Era of India, the satayuga. As a result, his India emerges as the Orient, as the Westerners’ point-of-view pertaining to India. His is not a post-colonial perspective but a colonial one looking at modern India as the ‘other’, just as the West does. Frantz Fanon asserts in The Wretched of the Earth, “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with
holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, and disfigures, and destroys it” (161). Tharoor, though not using “perverted logic”, is certainly “holding” the text in his grip without giving it any ‘oppositional discourse’.

India and the East normally have been interpreted by the West as the ‘other’, the unwanted and uncivilized, needing a master to tame them. This ideology is promoted alongside a promotion of the colonial culture as superior to the aboriginal culture. Reina Lewis says, “…imperialism as a mode of discourse that is based on ambivalence and anxiety, in which the colonial other is ‘at once an object of desire and derision’” (41). Tharoor’s representation of Indian women replicates this way of the ‘elitist West’ of looking at the ‘Orient’ thereby strengthening the Westerners’ notion of Indian ‘barbarism’ and lack of civility. The qualities of Indian women that have been ‘glorified’ in *The Great Indian Novel* alongside their ‘ideal traditionalism’ include sexual liberty leading to the train of illegitimate progenies. This seems to drag India into the same mire from which independence was supposed to pull it out. “Indians proved only too willing to echo Britain’s political illiteracy and agree to be defined in terms imposed upon them by their conquerors” (*The Great Indian Novel* 135).

In comparing the India of the 20th century with the world of *The Mahabharata* 5000 years back and claiming the latter as the ‘Golden Period’, Tharoor relegates the present into decay and rot. A text written in English by a diasporic writer born outside India, about India, seems attractive, but the representation in such cases becomes tricky. Tharoor presents India as defined by Western ideology, thereby only strengthening their belief. His representation is rooted in his identity, torn between India and the West. As a resident of the West with Indian roots he tries to come to terms with the image of India in the West. One attempt towards this is by calling India ‘over developed’ and in an advanced state of ‘decay’. However, a major factor here is that the narrator of the events does not acknowledge his position as a Westerner. There is an insistence on looking at India through an insider’s eye. But that ‘eye’ is of a caste Hindu who believes that Indian tradition and history contains the ‘golden phase’ of India and has been irretrievably lost. Kanishka Chowdhury avers: “…writers, such as Tharoor, are themselves the victims of divided allegiances and
ambivalent loyalties: their class position among largely illiterate populations, the material and discursive attractions of metropolitan centers, and the lure of recognition and publication offers from London and New York, among other factors, contribute to their unavoidable involvement in Western Cultural Systems” (42). As a result, it is a Westernized Hindu’s representation of India: “Everything in India is overdeveloped” (*The Great Indian Novel 1*).

The masculine and the feminine, in Tharoor’s India, are bound by traditions, and no questioning of the gendered society has been done to achieve a more equal order. The women fall into the same category of the ‘negative’ and subordinate to the male, remaining marginalized and secondary in the narrative, and characters like Priya too, are not permitted to supersede the boundaries of traditionalism. Kanishka Chowdhury’s telling observation sums up the representation of gender in *The Great Indian Novel*, “In [the] urgency to celebrate the recovery of the ‘national’ or ‘native’ voice, [one] avoid[s] highlighting the inevitable contradictions that must accompany any process of cultural recovery” (42). Tharoor’s work, then, does not emerge as, what she calls, “resistance literature” (43). It reflects what ‘Indianness’ stands for the West rather than showcasing what ‘Indianness’ is for an Indian.

Tharoor himself asserts in “Globalization and the Human Imagination”, “Think of India in the English-speaking world even today, and you think in images conditioned by Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster, by the Bengal Lancers and *The Jewel in the Crown*. But their stories are not my stories, their heroes are not mine; and my fiction seeks to reclaim my country’s heritage for itself, to tell, in an Indian voice, a story of India” (88). The India that he represents and reclaims is the India of heroes and of a lost legacy whose decayed and rotten remnants are visible today. The common man, the subaltern and the post-colonial Indian fail to find space in it. Kanishka Chowdhury says: “The banality of everyday life does not interest Tharoor or his narrator.” (44).

The India of Tharoor, hence, reflects an order of the traditional kind where the male and the masculine dominate over the female and the feminine. What is important is that both, the female and the male, are satisfied with the order: the female as the oppressed while the male as the oppressor. The India of the present times ‘silences’ any oppositional discourse by marginalizing the likes of Eklavya and Pandu, to assert
a homogeneous order on the lines of *The Mahabharata*. However, the present India is in contrast to that *satayuga*: its decayed and rotten relic.

Unlike *The Great Indian Novel* which begins with V.V., the narrator, Ganesha, the scribe, and the conditions of narrating and scribing, *Kitne Pakistan* begins with an ‘old story’ of Vidya, a beloved, and then, offering space to women, moves on to find the roots of the present ‘wasteland’ in the annals of time.

The narration begins with Indian women and their treatment. Kamleshwar says, “Woh isliye ki vilasi aryon ne aurat ko hamesha purush ki sampati mana hai...” (*Kitne Pakistan* 20). The context is the seduction of Ahilya by Indra and the subsequent ‘shrap’ of Rishi Gautam on her, Indra and Chandrma. Ahilya is punished for a crime not committed by her and is not offered even a chance to defend herself. The status of women in the Indian society in ancient India has not been very promising and the fact is that she is seen as subordinate to man. Even the great lawmaker Manu in his *Manusmriti* has asserted that women have to remain under the ‘supervision’ of the father before marriage, husband after marriage and son in the old age. Since then, things have been too promising for women: “How many women have the right to decide anything voluntarily...a woman cannot choose her husband or take decisions about her education or career...” (Bose Mandakranta, “Sati...” 28-29).

Women have been ‘labelled’ as protective mother as well as wife with destructive sexuality. As for the latter, asserts Samjukta G. Gupta: “her sexuality has the dangerous quality of seduction and even deception...the harsh treatment of widows stems from this fear and the desire to control her by the other, often cruel means” (95). The male, then, has taken over the mantle of ‘controlling’ that insatiable sexuality in woman. The allegation by Devi Tanya regarding their ‘sheelbhang’ by the male Gods in *Kitne Pakistan* is one way of doing that. Devi Tanya, the Mesopotamian Goddess, says, “Tum sab (Gods) stri par aasakt hokar uska sheelbhang kar sakte ho...avaidh santanen paida kar sakte ho...” (*Kitne Pakistan* 29). This description asserts the role the masculine plays and the subsequent feminine dislike for it. Kamleshwar’s description represents the status of women as the oppressed and how this oppression is brought about. Uma Chakravarti says that Manu, the Hindu law-giver, opined: “Women were created for the express purpose of giving birth, hence they are worthy of worship, the light of the house. To make the
transition from wife to legitimate motherhood, female sexuality had to be ‘managed’ to secure the goals of social reproduction” (69). The crucial question is that who shall manage the female sexuality? This managing, through the ages, has been the prerogative of the male and violence against women has been long justified under this pretext by the masculine. The narrative reflects how women through ages, places, times and religion have been oppressed, subjugated and sacrificed. It further reflects how women have been portrayed as a ‘commodity’, a product of ‘use and throw’ and this perspective of the masculine has reduced women to their long pervading plight.

As the mother, she has been the protector of the masculine even when she has been wronged“...sirf tumhen agaah kar rahi hoon...manushya ne jin jeevan-tatvon ko talasha hai aur aage talashega who hamari mrityu ki ghoshna hogi...” (Kitne Pakistan 30). The woman here, deliberately or out of compulsion, tries to protect the male. She saves him and humanity from destruction and tries to cover his faults. The trait, as the Indian mythological tradition has it, goes back to as far as when Indra, the Aryan God, kills Visvarupa and then to escape punishment, asks the women to take a share of the sin. The women accede to Indra’s plea and become guilty of a heinous crime of Brahmicide. “Thus women became impure, and menstruation, according to this myth, was associated with women’s participation in brahmana murder. It is the mark of their innate impurity and at the same time of their innate sexuality” (Chakravarti 70). As a result of the ‘protection’ by the women, Indra escapes and remains the powerful Aryan God as ever, while the females have been given short shrift and relegated to the status of the ‘other’.

In both the cases, the female gets categorized as the ‘other’ to the male who becomes the ‘self’ and hence dominates the social and literary space. She has offered herself as a sacrifice for the male who continues to prosper owing to his social domination. This is because woman’s portrayal and the determination of her role in India and worldwide has largely been the prerogative of men. A clear example is given by Samjukta G. Gupta in “The Goddess, Women, and Their Rituals in Hinduism”, where a comparison between Saranyu and Sita has been done: Saranyu, “because of her unwifely and unmotherly behavior was ignored as a goddess while the MP (Markandeya Purana) narrated the glory of the Great Goddess, the divine energy Mahamaya (cosmic illusion), who from that time onward gradually rose to eminence
as the mother of the universe...In this society, the role models for women are such epic and *puranic* characters as Sita, who followed her husband to his forest exile...” (87-88). It is her loyalty to her husband, father or son that determines her place in mythology, literature and life. Women have been defined by masculine standards thereby relegating them to the status of the ‘other’. The extent of the marginalization of the female can be assessed from what Uma Chakravarti opines: “While a few hymns are dedicated to female deities such as Usha, Aditi and Surya, these are nowhere as significant as those celebrating the power of the male Gods like Indra. In the family books—Mandalas II to VII, regarded as the earlier segments of the Rg Veda—only 22 hymns are addressed to the Goddesses whereas 407 hymns are addressed to the Gods” (43).

However, *Kitne Pakistan* portrays the struggle of the female as well. “—*Yeh to nyaya nahin hai...in Brahmaano ne apne shramjeevion ko shudra to banaya hi, inhone stri ko bhi dand dekar shudra ki shreni mein daal diyd’’* (Kitne Pakistan 21). Kamleshwar hence, offers space to the struggle of the ‘other’, the feminine as well. “...*khud aurat ne apni sabhyata ki raksha ki khatir apna balidan dekar is sanskriti ka munh ujla kiya hai...’’* (Kitne Pakistan 219). This feminine struggle has always been there but has been largely negated and marginalized and moreover, has always been within the framework of her ‘duties’ towards the masculine. The other, traditionally absent minority, are unable to assert themselves due to the domination of the majority and this makes it easier for the majority and powerful to impose their ideologies on the minority, the feminine. But Kamleshwar offers the minority, the ‘feminine’, space thereby questioning their oppression by the masculine. The female Goddess asserts: “*tum devtaon ki samast sabhyatayen nirjall hain’’* (Kitne Pakistan 32). The quote reflects that questioning of the prevalent masculine order by the feminine.

Kamleshwar also represents man as oppressed by the Gods, especially the male Gods, and the resistance of man against this imposed ‘femininity’ and ‘otherness’. “...*arya manushya ne prithvi ke mahatatv shram ko khoja aur atank-kari prakriti ko vashibhoot karne ke liye usne shanti jaisi mahashakti ka aavishkar kar liya hai...aap devtaaon ka parabhav nishit hai!’’” (31). God, the omnipotent attempts to dominate man as the ‘other’, but man, represented by the likes of Prometheus and Gilgamesh, struggles to overcome this hegemony and has found *shram* to topple the barbarism of
the Gods. The portrayal of Gods, the male Gods that is, reminds one strongly of Shakespeare's lines in *King Lear*: “As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods/They kill us for their sport”. Manasi Dasgupta and Mandakranta Bose, in “The Goddess-Woman Nexus in Popular Religious Practice: The Cult of Manasa”, opine, “If humankind is fated to live under arbitrary gods “as flies to wanton boys” who kill for sport, to cite old Gloucester in *King Lear*, can any idea of human worth emerge from the story? In answer, the only comfort comes from turning to those emotional responses that are unmediated by social injunctions...in direct contradiction to regulations” (158). Kamleshwar portrays God as the oppressive ‘self’ engaged in the domination of a resilient man.

The entire struggle of the ‘other’ against this tyranny of the male Gods is not only to oppose this ‘otherness’ but also to reconstruct history and tradition to show that the struggle of the ‘other’ has always been there in history and literature but has largely remained negated and marginalized. Gilgamesh and Prometheus represent the ‘oppressed’ common man relentlessly pursuing ‘space’ for himself. “Hahakaar to hai, poori duniya mein manvadhikaron ka hanan ho raha hai...lekin phir bhi kuch aisa bhi hai jo shubh hai” (Kitne Pakistan 179). Man is not sitting oppressed, rather he jostles for space with the female deities on his side. Gilgamesh says: “...manushya matr ke liye mrityu ko parajit karunga! Main mrityu se mukti ki aushadhi khoj kar laaunga” (34). It shows the determination of man to overcome the ‘tyranny’ of the Gods. It also resembles the concept of the ‘super-hero’, the superior being whose sufferings symbolize the sufferings of millions of people and who frees them from their distress.

Gilgamesh’s friend Enkidu also becomes important in the struggle of man against the tyrannous Gods. The seduction of Enkidu, as a heavenly conspiracy, and his subsequent conversion to a human becomes critical along with the attempts of Gilgamesh to free the world of death. His seduction is the first step and the lowest in the hierarchy towards becoming human and humane. Gilgamesh as the savior of mankind stands at the highest in this hierarchy. John Maier believes that sex and love are two kinds of human knowledge. While sex belongs to the lowest level of human knowledge, something everyone has to know and experience to become human, love stands at a higher level. Gilgamesh’s attempt to defeat death is out of his love for humanity and through it subvert the ‘otherness’ of humans in the eyes of the ‘divine’.
Gilgamesh and Enkidu, then emerge as the heroes who will give man the status of the ‘self’. They symbolize the eternal struggle of the ‘other’ for freedom, just like Prometheus.

Kamleshwar adds a whole new perspective to the entire issue of gender and identity that has remained negated in literature. “...har baccha maa ke pait se paida hota hai par tumhare Brahmano aur unke granthon ne maa ki kokh ka apmaan karte hue manushya ko Brahma ke alag-alag angon se paida karne ka sidhanth paida kiya...aaj ke shabdon mein kahun to tumhare Brahmano ne apna Pakistan bana liya” (Kitne Pakistan 103). The Brahmins created a ‘partition’ by using the Vedic texts and the sacred Vedantas and this not because they were the ‘other’ but rather the step resulted in the creation of the ‘other’ at two levels: first, the Shudras and the outcastes, and second, women. This is a case of new gender equation wherein the identity is a creation not of the ‘minority’ but of the ‘majority’ and that too without bloodshed. Moreover, there is no demand for independence either. Under this ‘new set-up’, as Madhu Khanna says, “women could not become priestess, run religious institutions, or have direct access to spiritual liberation” (109). It is sheer dominance by virtue of hegemony and suppression of the ‘tribal’ reality through a ‘power’ oriented discourse. The gender equation in the novel throws light on this past of India in particular and the world in general.

Kamleshwar, foregrounds the ‘otherness’ in the text by offering space to the little known or absent perspectives of the ‘other’. This offering of space to the unknown and unheard voices of the marginalized and the feminine makes his work a post-colonial one. Like a post-colonial he questions the established and standard norms of representation and power politics. In doing so, he not only offers the feminine space but also sheds light on the attitude of the feminine towards their negation. Moreover, Kamleshwar also questions the way history has worked for the powerful in the social order. He represents the ways in which the realities of the ‘other’ have been manipulated through the ages for vested interests.

Offering a space to the ‘other’ Kamleshwar says: “...aurat ki asmat ki bekadri aur uska ullanghan karna to aur bhi badi barbarta hai” (Kitne Pakistan 219). The statement portrays the ill-treatment meted out to women, as mortals as well as Goddesses, across time and space. Jane Austen says in Persuasion, “Men have had
every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands” (196). Woman has never been seen, asserts Sushila Singh, as, “a subject in her own right but merely as an entity that concerns man either in his real life or in his fantasy life” (qtd. in Ghanshyam, 128). Kamleshwar, on the contrary, presents woman “as a subject in her own right” and respects her individuality. This ‘respect’ becomes the touchstone and symbolizes the ‘other’s’ self-respect and personal identity being equally important as that of the ‘self’s’, and any transgression against this as an act of barbarism. Kamleshwar, in the process of offering ‘respect’ as the prerequisite for a peaceful existence, reflects the importance of equality and empathy in the post-colonial world. The colonial world lacked these and it ails us all even in the post-colonial times as we still cling on to those colonial legacies. Like a post-colonial writer, Kamleshwar retracts from the colonial belief of the ruler-ruled dichotomy to one of mutual respect and space for all, including the hitherto unheard voices. He generates an ‘oppositional discourse’ in Kitne Pakistan by breaking with the traditional format of discourse. His ‘oppositional discourse’ reconstructs the experience of the feminine from their point-of-view. Kamleshwar, thus, emerges as a post-colonial writer in the true sense.

Gender has been dealt with at different levels in the narrative: Gods and men, men and men, men and women. Kamleshwar does not restrict himself to the masculine-feminine dichotomy only in India or in the present times but deals with it spatially and temporally. He travels back and forth in history and moves across different civilizations exploring the issue of gender and the representation of the feminine before finally focusing on the history of India. His characters include goddesses like Devi Tanya, the Indian deities, incarnations like Lord Rama, the shudra Shambuk, Gilgamesh, Enkidu, King Babur and the Rajput warrior Rana Sanga. The text constructs a dialogue through the discussions and debates between the masculine and the feminine.

What is pertinent in the dialogue is the presence of a voice of the feminine. Kitne Pakistan interlinks politics, religion and gender through hundreds of years spanning different civilizations and places. The central idea is the chaos that has emerged over the centuries due to the atrocities committed by man on man in the name of power and religion. However, the ‘Wasteland’ that has emerged over the centuries is still not
devoid of hope. There are elements that have sustained and will sustain man till Gilgamesh returns with his answer to death. These elements can be summed up in the following lines in Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach”, “Ah love! Let us be true to one another”. The novel tries to offer a voice to all the perspectives that have been a part of history. It does not merely represent the popular and the dominant, nor does it give an overwhelming space to the historically oppressed and the marginalized. The text rather offers equal space to the dominant and the dominated, thereby ensuring space for the reader as well.

The text reflects the importance of ‘voice’ as: “...Main bhrasht ho gaye devtaon ke lok ki dastak hoon. Main insaan ke liye pyar dosti, shanty aur kranti ke moolya aur samrat Gilgamesh ki awaaz lekar aayi hoon...maine us samay is awaaz ko apni nahbi mein chupa liya tha, jab samast sabhyataon ke devta ise bandi banana chahate the...manushya ki yeh sabse badi dharohar hai...yeh bailos, bekhauf awaaz! Yahi main aapko saumpne aayi hoon.” (Kitne Pakistan 44). The ‘other’ has not been given access to this ‘voice’ in traditional literature and history. What occupies space is the elitist section, Brahmans in Indian context, the ‘representatives’ of God. Kitne Pakistan offers ‘voice’ to the ‘other’ but it is one of the several ‘voices’ in a labyrinth of voices, all free to interact. The novel here becomes a self-reflexive work. The stories in the novel are a reflection on the responsibilities of literature and its duty to reflect all the different voices. Kamleshwar says in the “Author’s Note” to the English translation of his novel by Ameena Kazi Ansari, “If one preconceives and predetermines the truth, it can only give one ephemeral insight; it rarely accords inner harmony. That is why, perhaps, a composition always seeks its own possible truth” (v). To “accord inner harmony”, Kitne Pakistan has a collection of voices, the authorial voice being one of many, and not prevailing over the other voices. His point-of-view that emerges is that of ‘respect’ for all and is free from the divisions of class, caste, sex and race. It is one based on the principle of ‘equality and empathy’. Kamleshwar’s perspective, his voice, forces a thinking process in the mind of the reader as to the utility of sticking to the colonial legacies that are only creating unbridgeable chasms between humans. Keeping his voice as one of the several voices, Kamleshwar comes across as an impartial and objective author.
The space offered to the rebellion of the ‘other’ in Kitne Pakistan offers a heroic stature to the feminine characters in the text. Their resistance to the prevalent social order is amply reflected in the desire of Gilgamesh to find “Mrityu ki aushadhi” as well as in the humanization of Enkidu, the one created by the Gods to kill Gilgamesh. In fact, Kamleshwar asserts that qualities like friendship have been developed by the oppressed—the feminine—to counter the atrocities of the oppressor—the masculine. He not only acknowledges the fact that ‘voice’ is essential for a just social order but also offers it to the ‘other’ giving them the power to assert themselves.

Kamleshwar’s representation of India centers on the struggle of the female and the feminine against an oppressed social order. The India constructed in Kitne Pakistan asserts the presence of alternative voices rather than a homogeneous order. The feminine, be it the women or the oppressed men, are no longer the ‘unwanted other’ but an integral part of Kamleshwar’s India. His is an India that follows the principle of ‘respect for all’ and hence, offers space to diverse view-points.

Somewhat like Kitne Pakistan, Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss centers on politics and gender relations in its wake. However, unlike Kitne Pakistan, the political events in The Inheritance of Loss pertain to post-independence India, and that too, to a small town, Kalimpong, in East India. The Gorkhas believe that India’s independence made them a minority and the ‘other’, who have to make sacrifice and live at the mercy of the powerful. “We are laborers on the tea plantations, coolies dragging heavy loads, soldiers. And are we allowed to become doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantations? No! We are kept at the level of servants” (The Inheritance of Loss 158).

This distinction has become class oriented. There are two classes, the educated and rich class comprising Jemu Patel, Sai, Lola and Noni and Father Booty, and the poor and mostly less educated class of the Gorkhas. The only one who is shown to have an education amidst the Gurkhas is Gyan. The distinction becomes clearer in the context of the former’s affiliation to England. Mandira Sen opines, “The opportunity to emulate a British lifestyle is what has drawn many westernized Indians to hill stations like Kalimpong, ...The two elderly women who take up Sai—Lola, a widow, and her sister Noni, who tutors Sai—live such a life” (27). In this class distinction, a hierarchization is also there with the educated rich class assuming the status of the
superior to the inferior poor class. As a result in the social order there are the rich ‘masculine’ and the poor ‘feminine’.

The text presents Gorkhas as the ones suppressed since independence and not treated on equal terms by the ‘natives’, government and the job sector. To add to this is the expectation of the majority that the Gorkhas be true and honest to them, which the Gorkhas believe they have been: “…they never had cause to doubt our loyalty” (The Inheritance of Loss 158). But still they are ill-treated and the novel reveals a stage where the ‘other’, oppressed for a long time, rises in rebellion demanding a separate identity based on geographical allocation. By being the ‘other’ they became the villains in the East. However initially they are not taken seriously owing to their minority and supposed inability to undertake any substantial action. “...and it was dismissed as nothing more serious than the usual handful of students and agitators” (The Inheritance of Loss 126). “But then one day fifty boys, members of the youth wing of the GNLF, gathered to swear an oath at Mahakaldara to fight to the death for the formation of a homeland, Gorkhaland...Gorkhaland for Gokhas” (126). Uniting under a common banner they find their chance to assert the element of ‘the masculine’ lying dormant within them for many years. As a result there is a conflict for space. The social space is defined and for status quo to stay the society has to abide by it. But if someone is not satisfied with the existing space, there are efforts to generate the desired space. But this does not come about easily and a struggle is evident to resolve the conflict. This space allocated depends on the power structure prevailing in the society. In other words, the order of the masculine and feminine determines what space is allocated to either in the society.

In India, this gender order is not individual but caste governed. However, in The Inheritance of Loss, class emerges as the defining factor for the social order. Mandira Sen asserts: “Class, too, intrudes, as educated, richer Indians try hard to differentiate themselves from the poor and the underclass” (27). The Gorkha Liberation struggle is an attempt to re-define the ‘gender space’ allocated to them by a dominant non-Gurkha society, the rich class. They want to deconstruct and reconstruct the entire gender space demanding a much larger portion for themselves. R. W. Connell asserts: “People construct themselves as masculine or feminine” (4) and the Gorkhas want to “construct” themselves as masculine.
However, as is the case, this attempt does not suit the status quo and reactions come forth. “Nonsense, those Neps will be after all outsiders now, but especially us Bongs...All kinds of atrocities will go on—they can skip merrily over the border to hide in Nepal.” (The Inheritance of Loss 127). In the wake of the widespread reactions any sympathetic voices are quickly drowned, “But you have to take it from their point of view, first the Neps were thrown out of Assam and then Meghalaya, then there’s the king of Bhutan growling against—” (128). The reply is quick and brief, “Illegal immigration” (128). There are some subdued voices in favour of the Gorkhas but largely the wave of opinion is against them.

Language again plays a critical role in these ‘voices’ against the Gorkha movement. “There’s no principle involved, Noni. And what is this with the GOrkha? It was always GUrkha...Why are they writing in English if they want to have Nepali taught in schools? These people are just louts, and that’s the truth...” (The Inheritance of Loss 247). There are no reasons why they use English in their rebellion. What is apparent rather is that language as a tool for rebellion has been rejected just like their rebellion by the non-Gurkhas who happen to be the elite, rich class. In the entire text, the perspective of the Gurkhas seems evasive and any voice sympathizing with them is drowned quickly.

The biggest reason for the ‘drowning’ of the voice of the Gurkhas is that the ‘power of representation’ in the text lies entirely with the non-Gurkhas who are the rich and the ‘masculine’. This is evident through the discrepancy between what the Gorkhas profess and what they practice. The disparaging remarks they hurl at Lola and Noni, their indulgence in looting and grabbing of land contradict their principles of ‘dignity’. The Gurkhas create the idea of a utopia having all the features and qualities denied to them as the ‘other’ by the power holders. “We will build hospitals and schools. We will provide jobs for our sons. We will give dignity to our daughters carrying heavy loads...we will defend our own homeland...we will run our own affairs in our own language...” (The Inheritance of Loss 159). However, the means adopted by them to achieve their target are in sharp contrast to their principles. “If necessary we will wash our bloody kukris in the mother waters of the Teesta” (159). Ironically, their terms for achieving a dominant space in the gender order through
bloodshed and arms are the ways they abhor when the same are used against them by the dominant class. Their demand for a modified social order, as a result, gets delegitimized.

The world of the Gurkhas comes across as one that violates the principles of a civilized and decent living. The text contrasts the civilized Anglicized society with the native Gurkha set-up, reminiscent of the colonial scenario where the ‘civilized’ British presumed to civilize the natives. As Tom Wilhelmus says: “Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss*...documents the collapse of one kind of civility based nostalgically on English life, and the emergence of another—rash, uncivil, chaotic, and violent—at large in India today” (345). There is only one point-of-view and voice in *The Inheritance of Loss* and that belongs to the non-Gurkhas, the elite and the ‘masculine’ who do not want the prevailing social order to change and hence the Gurkha struggle is labelled as irrational and undesirable.

Owing to the absence of a ‘voice’ with the Gurkhas, the alternative order that they demand does not come across as a shift for the better. Rather, it comes across as a chaotic order. The looting of Biju, the cook’s son, by the rebels highlights that chaos. The cook’s son returns from the States owing to the worsening political conditions in Kalimpong. He is the ‘other’ in the States, the feminine, but he does not doubt his legitimacy in Kalimpong which is ‘his land’. However, the sojourn abroad has stripped him off his status back home and he is just another victim for the rebels. The rejection of the Gurkha rebellion, by the ‘rich’ masculine, then, stands justified. The belief of the rich class that the Gurkhas are the outsiders without principles gains ground and so does the idea that the civilized ‘self’ should prevail over them.

Another aspect of the Gurkha rebellion raises the other gender issue in the text: the absence of women in the movement. Stephen M. Whitehead says that “there is a material actuality to masculinities, frequently underpinned by violence or its threat...As Bowker puts it, violence represents the ‘dark side of masculine role performance’ with 90 percent of violence being perpetrated by men” (35). The ‘Gorkha Liberation struggle’ is of the ‘other’, but their female counterparts do not find any significant space in the text. The sister and mother of Gyan stay behind the walls of the house and the sister’s attempt to ‘see’ outside is “looking at them curiously” (*The Inheritance of Loss* 257). The liberation struggle, the guns and
looting, the arrogance towards the victims—all are the prerogatives of the masculine and hence men indulge in them.

This raises the issue of the male vs the female in the text and the women in *The Inheritance of Loss* do not appear to be emerging out of the shadow of the male. The portrayal of women in the text is an important aspect of the novel. The conspicuous female characters in the novel are Sai, Noni, Lola and Judge’s wife Nimi, representing three generations, with Nimi from the oldest, Lola and Noni from the middle while Sai from the youngest generation. Nimi, the oldest, is the most traditional. Married off at the age of 14 to Jemu, the would-be-judge she is left alone immediately as Jemu leaves for London. She becomes the symbol of family ‘deals’ prevalent in the times. She returns to her father’s home when Jemu leaves and goes back once he returns as a judge. However, she is more conspicuous by her silence than by her voice. The words that define her existence are “SILENCE, more silence”. Silence, in its course begets isolation, and Nimi is no exception. She is left by Jemu at home and he does not take her to any place with him. He tries his bit to teach her but in vain. It is clear that Jemu feels she is not worthy of him.

Whatever the reader knows of the lady is through others, someone speaking for her, and more often than not, the feeling of loathing is what is invoked from the definitions she has been given. She is the one who “had spent nineteen years within the confines of her father’s compound and she was still unable to contemplate the idea of walking through the gate” (*The Inheritance of Loss* 171). Another definition is, “Stupid bitch, dirty bitch!” (305). In contrast to her are several ‘emancipated’ women, the sly ones who play clever on women like Nimi. She is taken to a procession on purpose and as a result the judge abandons her. The only words she utters to the judge are, “*You are the one who is stupid*” (304).

Nimi is the silent traditional woman who does not contradict her husband for a long time and silently bears all that he inflicts upon her. But just before he finally packs her off, she utters the above statement. This traditional woman does not fit into the judge’s westernized way of living. He needs someone who is westernized, so he keeps Miss Enid Pott to ‘train’ her. In contrast to her stands Mrs. Mohan, the congresswoman, who takes Nimi to a demonstration where Nehru is present. Nimi is totally oblivious of the fact and of all that is planned against her. Mrs. Mohan stands
as the prototype of what Nimi might have become had she been successfully trained by Miss Pott.

Nimi remains the butt of ridicule for all the people, the ‘other’ in the gender hierarchy, not only to her husband but also to other women like Mrs. Mohan. She, by virtue of her silence, is whatever others, such as Jemu himself and Mrs. Mohan, make her. Looking at her ‘definitions’—‘bitch’, ‘ignorant’, ‘country bumpkin’, ‘liar’, ‘incredibly stupid’ and ‘all of the above’ one realizes that they do not match the qualities of the Indian traditional woman. So she is not the traditional Indian woman either. Then where does she stand vis-à-vis the Indian women? It is difficult to ascertain her position because her character is entirely based on the observations of others, making her identity hazy and unclear. However, certainly Nimi can be placed as the ‘other’, the unwanted and the negative in the gender order.

There are some other female characters too and there is a sense of desertion about them. Sai’s mother is one such character in the novel, never present physically as she is already dead when the novel begins. She is forsaken by her parents after she marries out of her religion. Jemu Patel, her father, abandons her “cutting her off completely when she married a Parsi” (Sen 27).

Other characters are Lola and Noni, two middle-aged women living together for a long time and very little is known about their past except that Lola’s husband Joydeep desired to stay at Kalimpong but has died. The two ladies live there and are alone in that part of the country. These women also form the ‘other’ of gender, the unwanted part. This is clear from the fact that the two of them have no one to turn to when they are humiliated by the Gorkha men leaders after their men build an illegal colony in their premises. This humiliation and illegal occupation of their property stands in contrast to the looting at the home of Jemubhai Patel. The femininity of Lola and Noni and the masculinity of Jemubhai in their ‘educated’ social order comes to the fore here. Even though there are suggestions that it was on Gyan’s information that the house of Jemubhai Patel was looted, the gender significance does not go unnoticed in the text. Possession of guns is a masculine trait hence it is the judge who keeps them rather than the two women. R. W. Connell says: “Men are much more likely than women to own weapons – by a ratio of four to one, according to research on gun ownership in the USA” (2). Lola and Noni’s house is financially better off than the
judge's but their British richness could not save them as the rebels built an illegal colony on their land. Mandira Sen says: "The wealth that seemed to protect them [Lola and Noni] like a blanket was the very thing that left them exposed" (28). Hence, within the 'elitist', rich class' social order, Jemubhai, because he is the male, remains the masculine to the 'feminine' females. But in the larger social order where the Gurkhas are vying for masculinity, Jemubhai and the two women emerge as the feminine.

One thing that clearly emerges is the secondary status of women in the text. Desai represents the traditional portrayal of the Indian woman—living in the male shadow. This reminds one of Vijay Mishra's definition of diaspora, "...it is "a fossilized" fragment of an original nation-that seeks renewal through a "refossilization" of itself" (qtd in George 183). Desai has pulled out a 'fossilized' Indian woman from literature and 'refossilized' her in the present times. The traditional women constructed in orthodox literature retains its position in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Another instance of the 'femininity' of the female may be seen in Sai. Sai wants to escape from the life at Cho Yu and she sees Gyan as her 'liberator'. She believes that it is Gyan who will take her away from her life at her grandfather's home. She depends on the male to move out of her routine and mundane life that bores her. This reflects, on the one hand the dull, drab, dreary and routinized life of the female and on the other hand, her dependence on male for freedom. She longs for a change but cannot escape her 'destiny' on her own. She requires a masculine support to cross over even if the masculine is not socially equal to her. Alan Cheuse opines: "Granddaughter Sai is a glorious teenager, in love with the world around her and in love with reading, reading faster and faster until, as Desai says, 'she was inside the narrative and the narrative inside her, the pages going by so fast, her heart in her chest, she couldn't stop.' While Sai immerses herself in her books, there is a glimpse of the world around her where indigenous Nepalese exiles, the cheap labor of the region, rise up to call for an independent state within a state. One of these young rebels is a handsome fellow named Gyan, who happens to be the science tutor of young Sai—and the first great love of her life—though he abandons her rather rudely for the burgeoning political movement" (36). Sai, in spite of her good qualities, is
dependent on Gyan, the one who ‘abandons’ her for the political movement though he still loves her.

A very pertinent gender relationship develops in the love affair between Sai and Gyan. Sai is the granddaughter of Jemubhai Patel, a judge, and the daughter of a pilot whereas Gyan, a Gurkha, is from a humble and poor background and brought up in a slum. Sai is unaware of the past of her family except that her father and mother left for Russia when her father was selected to represent India in an Indo-Russian Space programme while Gyan always shies away from divulging any details about his family. Their relationship, in spite of the gaping difference in their social status and background reflects the fluidity of gender.

In the traditional order prevailing in Kalimpong over the years, Sai’s parents and Sai are the ‘self’ while Gyan and his family are the ‘other’. However, as their relation progresses and their love reaches its zenith, both become complementary to each other and the question of gender disappears into the background for some time. But as the trouble boils over in the region the issue of gender reappears, with Gyan, a Gorkha, trying to assert himself over her and over their relationship. Herein, Gyan goes away from Sai and does not want to return to her. Here, by virtue of making decisions for himself and Sai, Gyan assumes the status of the masculine.

The relation of Sai and Gyan is a complex one if seen from the perspective of gender. Their relationship stands as a reflection of the fluidity of gender. Gender, as seen through Sai and Gyan, is not something that is fixed but highly mobile and could be neutral as well. Moreover, it shows how the order changes with change in the external circumstances. As long as Sai and Gyan are in love they blur every social order with no clear demarcations of the masculine and the feminine. However, as the political conditions worsen in the state, their relationship takes a backseat. “It was a masculine atmosphere and Gyan felt a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda” (The Inheritance of Loss 161). Suddenly the social order of gender makes a distinct entry into their lives and immediately their relationship develops a strain. Relegated as the ‘other’, the feminine for so many years, this newly earned masculinity through the GNLF Movement charges Gyan and even though he did not agree entirely with GNLF agenda, his heart forces him into following it. This emotional ecstasy at the adoption of power changes him and his relationship with Sai.
Objection to Christmas becomes an expression of that emotion, “I am not interested in Christmas! Why do you celebrate Christmas? You’re Hindus and you don’t celebrate Id or Guru Nanak’s birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year” (The Inheritance of Loss 161). Desai adds, “Christmas had never bothered him before—” (174). Suddenly, there springs a desire in Gyan to dominate Sai and make her do what he feels is right. One is reminded of Shobha De’s Starry Nights where Akshay wants his wife to follow the lines he draws for her but at the same time wants himself to be free of any restrictions.

The change in the gender order brought about by the GNLF men directly affects the love of Gyan and Sai. He wants to be the masculine and Sai, the feminine. As a result he attempts to become the decision maker, the authority whom Sai has to follow and obey. However, this masculinity does not go with his home, hence he is not pleased when Sai comes down to meet him at his home. He argues with her as he sees her visit as an encroachment on his masculinity. However, he still loves her and at times his love supersedes his feeling of gender superiority. At such times he is at home with Sai and tries to spend time with her.

Sai, on the other hand is unable to fathom this change in Gyan and the sudden encroachment of the social order in their love affair. It takes her some time to realize this shift though her first encounter with this change is in Darjeeling where Gyan ignores her when he is participating in the GNLF procession. For Sai, Gyan is the one who will take her away from the ‘closed’ life she is leading at Cho Oyu, but his sudden involvement in the GNLF movement is something unthinkable to Sai. Later on, however she begins to fathom the change and she also concludes that Gyan is the one who must have informed about the guns to GNLF men and she also blames him for the forced departure of Father Booty back.

Sai and Gyan, in the beginning, seem to be madly in love with each other and above all the turmoil prevalent in the region. However, the emotions invoked by the GNLF and their desire to be the masculine in the political and social life of the region affect their relationship. Slowly, love takes a backseat with GNLF and ‘their’ proposed social order taking the frontseat. Love then, does not stand a chance and tension mounts between Sai and Gyan. This tension stays in spite of some ‘good’ moments.
that the two spend together even after their relationship is strained. The woman, Sai, is again relegated in the gender hierarchy as her ‘escape’ route is blocked.

Portrayal of women by women writers assumed a vital significance in the 19th century. One reason for this was the spread of education among women. D. Murali Manohar quotes P. S. Balasubramaniam: “By the beginning of the nineteenth century women in India were hardly educated” (1). He adds, “However, in North India ‘female education was encouraged by the Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu sect...By the end of the nineteenth century, progressive Arya Samajists recognized the importance of involving women in their reform efforts’” (2). Slowly, but surely, women education and awareness increased and by the beginning of the 20th century women were raising their voice against the ‘silence’ imposed on them for centuries. Traditionally, opines Meena Shirwadkar, the West has conceived woman in two images, the homely blonde or the seductive brunette and more often than not not the brunette is the “Jewish, Oriental, Spanish or Italian” (1). In India, women are normally framed in the “Sita type, the Pativrata...which goes back to the epics and even the Vedas” (Shirwadkar 2). However, these have largely been male perspectives in the narrative while the women’s opinion has remained marginal. As Shirwadkar further asserts, “Culture is male. There is female culture, but it is an underground unofficial, minor culture, occupying a small corner of what we think of officially as possible human experience. Both men and women in our culture conceive the culture from a single point of view—the male” (3).

It would not be out of place to discuss here how Desai, a female herself, represents women in her work. Historian Linda Gordon says that feminism is “an analysis of women’s subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it” (qtd in Osmond 592). However, with The Inheritance of Loss this analysis becomes secondary, given the fact that Desai is herself a woman and hence it seems implied that she would speak ‘of the women’ and ‘voice’ their experience. However, women do not occupy a central position in the text. True, by virtue of the title women identify with it as they mostly inherit ‘loss’ through the journey of their lives.

Rushdie holds, “...the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience...loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of
his being ‘elsewhere’. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal” (*Imaginary Homelands* 12). He further adds, “To forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers, would be, I believe, to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile which in South Africa is called the ‘homeland’” (19). Maybe Desai too believes more in this ‘universal significance’ and hence attempts to move out of the ‘community of women’ to address more pertinent issues. It, however, remains a fact that the female ‘voice’ is not as strong as feminists would have expected in a work produced by a 21st century ‘emancipated’ woman.

The marginalization of women, according to K. K. Ruthven, is not due to their biologically inferior status but due to their inferior status in a male dominated culture and this subjection will not end “until they themselves exercise the power of naming” (3). Ruthven further asserts that women are made to believe that their sole purpose is reproduction of human species and hence their portrayal either as the homely blonde or the brunette, either way it is their biological sexuality that is flaunted. In this way, women remain prisoners in the prison-house of a male oriented language. To emerge from this they need a language and a voice to assert themselves. Desai seems wanting in this and rather asserting the issue of Gurkha insurgency and immigration. Both the themes are indirectly related to women, with respect to their ‘otherness’, but the text largely remains male oriented.

*The Inheritance of Loss* constructs an India that does not offer space to the alternative and unheard voices in a masculine social order. On the contrary, it is the rich upper class that dominates the social order, and does not tolerate any ‘disparities’ in it. Rosemary Marangoly George opines “The India that is declared "better than all the universe" is the one carried over and nostalgically recreated in the mind, the heart, the food, the festivals, the clothes, the music, the films and sometimes even the literature” (179). Desai’s novel, on the contrary, presents an India that is not better than the universe but divided, surprisingly, not on caste grounds, but on class distinctions for the rich and the poor and on the traditional concepts of the male-female for men and women. The masculine, the rich and the males respectively, leave no space for the ‘other’.
An important idea that emerges from the portrayal of gender by the five writers is that gender depends on a number of factors. As a result, gender, apparently rigid and fixed, actually relies on the social conditions and traditions prevailing in the society and adapts accordingly. R. W. Connell says: “Part of the mystery of gender is how a pattern that on the surface appears so stark and rigid, on close examination turns out so fluid, complex and uncertain” (4). In fact, it is tradition and culture that makes gender what it is in each of the texts. However, at a given point, gender order is established in a society and men and women are placed in that order. In each of the five texts there is a pre-established gendered society where the characters are placed.

The colonial parameter and the traditional male-female binary norm determine gender in *A Passage to India* where the female is subjugated to the male while the colonized is dominated by the colonizer. In the process, the Indian female becomes the doubly oppressed. In *Midnight’s Children* it is the Indian society that defines gender. The traditional concept of the male and the female is prevalent but the text and the male characters in it emerge as rebels against that order. Characters like Aadam and Saleem are the ‘oppressed oppressors’ in a social order where Padma still longs for a ‘social promotion’ through marriage.

In *The Great Indian Novel*, the traditional norm comes Priya’s way while the masculine and the male sit pretty over the existing order. Gangaji asserts his ‘self’ over the likes of Pandu and though he fails in the end, he is glad to be the ‘self’ in his lifetime and Priya still depends on the male to execute her ‘power fist’. Moreover, for Tharoor, the present gendered social order is a corrupt form of the ideal times of *The Mahabharata*, thereby reflecting the legitimacy of the traditional order where the feminine is subservient to the masculine. The failure of Gangaji reflects the overwhelming nostalgia for the traditional order present no more. In *Kitne Pakistan*, Kamleshwar throws open the gates of time and space for the characters to move freely and this is his rebellion against the existing gendered social order. Moreover, he offers space and voice to the long suppressed feminine and gives his opinion of ‘respect for all’ as one of the several voices engaged with each other. His is, then, a truly post-colonial expression of gender. Finally, in *The Inheritance of Loss* it is again the traditional notions of male-female that order the social structure. There is, however, another factor that determines the order and that is class. The upper class dominates
the lower but the situation is different from *A Passage to India* as there is no representation of the lower class females even though it has been composed outside the colonial time frame. Females form a part only of the upper class and there too, they are marginal and dependent. The text, authored by a female, places the females in a marginalized position and at the same time the feminine, the Gurkhas, are labeled as disrupters of peace and promoters of chaos and anarchy.

The representation and construct of gender in the five texts, then, reflects that while the society places men and women in a pre-determined social order, it is the characters that either accept the order or stand against it. In the wake of theses alternatives, gender too assumes an unstable nature, one that is always prone to change if need be. The entire idea can be summed up in R. W. Connell’s statement: “There are whole social movements dedicated to re-establishing ‘the traditional family’, ‘true femininity’ or ‘real masculinity’. These movements are themselves clear evidence that the boundaries they defend are none too stable” (5).

The entire issue of gender, yet again, broaches the pertinent issue of the ‘representation of the other’ and the adequacy of language, centered around male culture, to do justice to this representation. Language, the means to reaching reality, has been dominated by the masculine through the ages and how with time this domination has increased is evident in *The Inheritance of Loss* where a 21st century work by a female is unable to offer space to a ‘voice’ of the feminine. On the other hand, Kamleshwar, a regional writer, deals with the feminine ‘voice’ by portraying both the masculine and the feminine perspectives over the ages reflecting the inadequacy of history and literature in reflecting the feminine point-of-view convincingly. The exiles, in their portrayal have largely put ‘tradition before women’ stressing that the female remains the ‘other’ except in case of a conflict with tradition, and that too is temporary. Naseem’s refusal to remove the *purdah* is a point in case. But at the same time, the male rises against this as the ‘oppressed oppressor’. Men like Forster, the colonial, have portrayed women in the classical western mode of the ‘other’, the English woman one step ‘other’ while the Indian woman twice the ‘other’ in relation to the masculine.

The different portrayals of Indian woman by the five authors throw light on a few crucial facts. First, culture and language are heavily biased towards the masculine and
the female 'voice', wherever present, has also been represented through it, an exception being *Kitne Pakistan*, and to some extent, *Midnight's Children*. “The subjection of women, therefore, is brought about not by their ‘natural’ inferiority but by their classification as intrinsically inferior by a male-dominated culture they cannot avoid living in” (Ruthven 44). However, one thing about India that stands out in this representation is the presence of the ‘other’, the feminine, and its struggle. It may be a ‘minor’ presence owing to the overwhelming presence of the ‘self’, but it asserts its presence giving India the status of a heteroglossia.