CHAPTER- IV

Conflict Between Desire and Demand in Search for an Identity:

Women Characters in Home

Home (2006), the third novel by Kapur, explores an ordinary middle-class family’s life in Delhi. The head of this family, Banwari Lal is a follower of patriarchy and believes that men should work out of the home and women should within, that men carry forward the family line and women enable their mission. Hannah Sophiah Samuel writes, “Manju Kapur in her novel Home deals with the problem of Indian women in a male-dominated joint family. Kapur skillfully brings out how gender issues are deeply rooted and stem out from social norms and traditions in which women are made captives and thereby to an extent capturing the man too from being their real selves. According to Radha Chakravarthey “gender issues are central to Kapur’s worldview in the lines of the female figures; we encounter questions about marriage, motherhood, women’s education, women’s work in and out of the home, the body, sexuality, the different forms of violence against women ranging from emotional blackmail to dowry , deaths and sexual abuse”.¹

The whole novel is woven around the life of a middle class family with the focus on women in which some try to make their lives adjustable while others are seen engaging with something different from traditional roles and gain their own identity. Among the various women characters, Nisha’s character, the daughter of Sona, is seen as more promising. She struggles to search an identity as a successful business woman and somehow succeeds. An abridged but substantial summary covers the back cover of the novel:
Banwari Lal, the patriarch of a family-run cloth business in Karol Bagh, is a believer in the old ways. Men work out of the home, women within. Men carry forward the family line, women enable their mission. But all is not as it seems. His two sons may unquestioningly follow their father in business and in life, but their wives will not. Neither will his granddaughter who is determined to strike her own path. In the midst of these tensions, a secret emerges which threatens the old-fashioned family to its foundation.²

The chapter focuses on identity. The different women characters succeed in gaining different types of identity as feminist women, domestic or patriarchal women, rebels or victims. As the novel starts with Sona and Rupa, this chapter starts with the identity that Sona and Rupa succeed in getting. The opening of the novel—“Mrs. Sona Lal and Mrs. Rupa Gupta, sisters both, were childless.” Kapur raises the eyebrows of a reader, especially, a female reader. So many questions come to mind. Why does the novelist want her reader to know about these sisters, that they are childless? And the answer that she gets with the life she has lived and the experiences she has gained, is that the identity that a woman gets in society is mainly patriarchal, at first with her association with the father, after marriage through the name of her husband and after marriage it is child that gives her her identity. It makes the reader to think about the condition of a woman in the society that is dominated by man. Both sisters are childless and are taunted for it. They want to gain their identity as mothers. Here again a question comes to the reader’s mind that why instead of trying to have their recognition as mothers, they are not struggling to gain recognition as individuals. It order to justify their willingness, here the term “Hegemony” used by Gramci can be used. Their willingness is nothing else but the consent gained by continuous force.
The novelist starts depicting the difficulties that both sisters face. She presents Rupa, the younger sister, in a less tormented condition because she is not taunted for her childlessness as Sona is who finds that “the ache in her empty heart and belly increased day by day.” As the novel develops, Kapur gives a specific place to her female characters to delineate the lives they are living and struggling to search a proper place for them that can give them identity of their own instead of a daughter, sister, wife and mother.

First it starts with Sona, wife of Yashpal. She comes out as patriarchal woman because she tries to gain her identity in patriarchal set up by trying to fit in it. She and Yashpal have a love marriage that results in much negligence and ill-treatment for Sona. When Yashpal expresses his wish to get married with Sona, it was supposed to be the result of black magic cast on Yashpal by Sona. As his mother says:

The girl must have done black magic to ensnare him, otherwise would he go against his own family after seeing her face for a second? Tell him not to bother leaving house. I myself will disappear to make way for the wretch he prefers before us all.\(^3\)

Here Sona is blamed who does not even initiate the relationship. The question arises why it is only the girl who is blamed. After much hassle and the advice of a Baba who said that she was supposed to bring prosperity to the family because of her name “Sona”-“the word took on the hue of a good omen”, the marriage took place. But she had to face the anger and abuses of her mother-in-law for long. Her rage has been expressed in this line-“She could tear the girl’s eyes out, mischief-makers, tear them out with her bare hands.”\(^4\) Her mother-in-law’s ill-treatment continues for her and it becomes worse when she remains unfertile for long. She is
tortured with harsh words by her mother-in-law. She herself finds her life futile as she was unable to conceive like her sister Rupa:

“It turned out that Rupa too failed to conceive. Sona hid this fact as long as she could from her in-law, she knew exactly the kind of comment it would elicit. Bad stock, tainted blood-lines. But concealment was useless, eventually these things were said.”

She turns towards fasting and praying to make her pregnancy possible. The feeling of barreness kept on giving her the feeling of distress. One thing that is noticeable is that Kapur presents her female characters in different forms. Often one is seen to be exploited and unhappy, finding her confined in the patriarchal structure of the society, on the other hand some others struggle to come out from this pre-designed society and make efforts to make their mark as an important and integral part of society. We find Sona and Rupa in the the same condition, but the former completely shaped according to the form predesigned for her and following her duty. Where there she finds her helpless to follow her duty, she rebukes herself. While on other hand the latter is seen in a different form. Instead of regretting for her barrenness, she searches a new way to prove her utility and makes herself independent by starting a business of making of pickles.

Sona is tortured by her mother-in-law, inspite of all the care and devotion. She cannot think about any other thing except a child because all the time she is humiliated because of barreness. Here the bitter words of her mother-in-law spoken after the unfortunate death of her daughter Sunita can be quoted. She says, “You think sleep is possible? What can you know of a mother’s feelings? All you do is enjoy life, no children, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you.”
It took all of Sona’s training in daughter-in-lawhood to continue her attentions as though this had not been said. If she got the support from her in-law’s family, she could have done something different instead of wasting her life like that, only praying and waiting for the blessing of child. When she is given Vicky, Sunita and Murli’s son, after the death of Sunita, Sona is not ready to accept him easily. She talks about it to her husband not to give her his responsibility because she wanted her own child. But all her pleas are vain. Yashpal tries to make her agree. He never reproached her for not giving him with a child, but now he wants her to accept Vicky as the will of God who has fulfilled their wish in this way. Her mother-in-law’s words are— “It was your kismet not to have children so you could be a true mother to your nephew.” Her childless situation made her to bear these remarks silently but it pierced her heart.

Sona is fully soaked with the traditional mindset that a woman is to have a child. She finds herself unable to conceive. When her sister suggests that she should consult a doctor, she thinks it would be humiliating to be seen as a “flawed creature” to get medical aid to perform a “natural function”. She cannot initiate this by herself unless it is suggested by her in-laws. Delineating a true picture of an Indian society Kapur shows how Sona, as well as, her in-laws believe in miracles done by God instead of deficiency and its cure by a doctor. Sona keeps fast and her father-in-law plans to visit a shrine at Chitai, near Almora. Though the novel is set in India of 1960s when it was the prevailing thought, but even today many believe in miracles by God more than medical treatment as Kapur has shown in her latest novel Custody (2011).

One thing that is noticeable is how a woman is seen always dependent on others. As a child she needs to be dependent but after passing this stage and coming
to her youth why does she not become independent. The answer may be that she gets her upbringing within such constricted walls that do not make her suitable to be independent in future. Is this not the cunningness of patriarchal society that deprives a plant of proper care and nuture and as result it needs the support even after growing to a tree? What feminists want is to give proper care to a girl by giving her proper education and help to become a person. It is only proper education that can provide them help in their independence. And it would result in happy future of a woman when instead of being exploited by the dominated society, they could succeed in proving their ability and would become equally important in the society that is made of two sexes, of man and woman.

Sona is seen impatient for a child, but she is not happy with Vicky who is given to her as her adopted child. She is forced to look after him and she does it unwillingly. As she says to her sister Rupa, “According to them my prayers are answered. Now they are busy making sure that child is a noose around my neck. Why didn’t he die with his mother?” Here Kapur wants to depict the mentality of an Indian woman who wishes to have an issue from his or her own flesh and blood. Rupa wishes as she says again and again, that she wants a child of her own. She could fulfill her desire of child by giving her love to Vicky but she fails in doing so. As Kapur herself writes, “Poor Sona, if only she could get rid of certain notions her life would be easier. Having Vicky was not such a bad thing, all the boy needed was a little love, he was still a child, and from the same family.” So, this is also the need of time to come out from this narrow thinking if women want the betterment of their life. Her negligence of Vicky questions her motherly feeling. She does not look after him. When she conceives she gets happiness and interprets it as the blessings of
Devi. She conceives after ten years and it made her time good. She starts getting proper attention:

The next seven months were momentous ones. Sona’s diet, her rest, her activities were treated with greatest of care. Vitamins, minerals, iron supplements, almonds, butter, and milk were showered on her.\(^{10}\)

The behaviour of her mother-in-law is also changed. She ill treats Sona with her ill words but when she conceives she starts giving her proper care and gets changed her behavior. As Sona says, “Oh, she has completely changed. She doesn’t even let me bend to pick up anything.”\(^{11}\) This is very surprising to Rupa who says, “That’s very convenient,” remarked Rupa, “to change from poison to honey just like that.”\(^{12}\) Sona seems to live her life according to patriarchal system and tries to make herself part of it, she comment: “Oh, she wanted a grandchild. It is understandable….It is the way of the world.”\(^{13}\)

She gives birth to a girl and the girl is accepted by the family. Sushila expresses her happiness. She discloses a secret that all of them already knew that Sona is going to give birth to a baby girl. But negligence of Vicky by Sona questions her motherly feeling. She does not look after him when everyone expects her to. The treatment given to Vicky especially by Sona is heart rending as she uses him as a servant.

Sona’s shortconming is her jealous nature. For example Sona who not only expresses her dislike for Sushila most of the time but has also a feeling of jealousy for her own real sister Rupa. When Nisha is sent to Rupa and she starts giving her love and care like her true mother that results in Nisha loving her aunt more than her real mother Sona ,it makes Sona more aggressive. But other members of the family do not agree with her. They are happy to have Nisha in the house of Rupa and Prem Nath, the childless couple because they as well as Nisha are happy there.
After the death of Banwarilal, Yashpal, husband of Sona insisted on taking Nisha back from Rupa to give company to Ma-ji. She makes Sona worried:

She had to bring Nisha home but what about Rupa, and more importantly, what about Nisha’s studies? At least she had one child whose performance she could boast about, even though that child was a girl who, despite the overuse of her brains, was only going to get married.  

The thinking of Sona reflects the discrimination a girl faces, whose last business in life is to get married. Living in a patriarchal society, Sona’s mind had been narrowed and instead of favouring the economic upliftment of woman, she sees a girl doing a job as a shame on the family. Such thinking is to make the life of a girl worse.

Sona is found to be a narrow minded woman who was fed herself with the thoughts that only serve to make the life of a female worse and degrading. She does not appear in anyway a supporter of empowerment of woman. Kapur, with the character of Sona delineates the reality of society where there are a number of Sonas who should be held responsibilities for the unchanged narrow existence of women because they favour the constricted upbringing of women who must always remain dependent on the male all her life. How narrow minded she appears when she gives education for a girl and says, “People are suspicious of brides that are very educated. Too many ideas make it difficult to adjust replies Sona, resenting the slur on her own twelfth class status.”

It seems that Sona had only one aim in life- to get Nisha married. When Nisha suggests doing a course in fashion designing after B.A., she ignores it all and even rebukes Nisha for it. She did not care about the wishes of Nisha. Sona trains Nisha
to bow to her in-laws wishes. It refers no freedom of a woman, as she says, “Once you are married, and in your own home, you can do what your in-laws think fit.”

Sona gets worried when Nisha starts suffering from a skin problem. At that time too she thinks only about marriage. As she says, “Your skin become as black as a buffalo’s; then nobody will ever marry you.” A number of doctors declared that the cause of her eczema is emotional; that is undoubtedly her forceful separation from Suresh. But Sona was not ready to accept this and she says again and again that it is an evil eye that has ruined the fair complexion of Nisha.

A girl doing a business was supposed to be an act of shame by the members of family. The question arises – why success in business in always the prerogative of a son and there is a lack of support and confidence if a daughter is going to start a business? This question can arise in a reader’s mind regarding the upcoming thoughts that came in mind of Yashpal: “Her father was trusting her as he would have trusted a son.”

The other character Rupa, sister of Sona, is presented as confident and courageous, though she undergoes the same condition of being unable to conceive. She comes out as an independent woman because she tries to get herself an identity unlike Sona who devotes all her time to think about an issue. The novelist says: Rupa was childless, but free from torment. She accepted her fate, she didn’t spend every Tuesday fasting, she had no one to keep those wounds bleeding by hurting comments.

She gets support from her husband and from her father-in-law. As she herself says that her husband does not hanker after children, her sister is enough to fulfill this emptiness. Rupa accepts it and does not waste her time only in making herself sad on her barreness like Sona. Even when Sona conceives considering it as the
blessing of Devi, instead of thinking about her failure in conceiving, she accepts her blessing in the progress of her business. This can be seen as Rupa’s progressive thinking who tries to come out from the narrow thinking of traditional women who find it difficult to think beyond household chores, service of in-laws and giving birth to children. Sona’s husband also helps her with his contact among shopkeepers. She was progressing day by day. There is no doubt that it is with the support of the male members of the family that she could succeed in business. So, it is the support of men that can make the upliftment of women possible. As Mata Bhagwati Devi Sharma writes in one of the book *Mahila Jagran ki Dishadhara* (it is my translation of her words):

> Mahila Jagran Abhiyan should be initiated by woman herself. She herself should steps forward to come out from worse condition. One who goes upward by oneself, is helped by others’ helping hands… these awakened women should be given keen support from the back by those men who have good will for them.\(^\text{20}\)

One can also compare the attitude of two sisters to children. One hand there is love of Rupa for Nisha who was not their own and on the other hand there is love of Sona for Vicky. Both are opposite in their love. In Rupa one can find true motherly feelings and in Sona confined only for her own child. When Nisha comes in Rupa’s home, she is given much of love and attention by Rupa and the love helps her to get rid of the bad dreams she used to see after the sexual fear she has been given by Vicky. Kapur herself points out the difference, “Two sisters more different than Sona and Rupa he could not imagine. One self-obsessed, complaining and dissatisfied, the other well of sweet water from which everyone drank.”\(^\text{21}\)
Her business continued to prosper with Yashpal redoubling his effort to help the relatives who were looking after his daughter. The love of Rupa for Nisha was true unlike Sona’s for Vicky. She comes out as a true mother. She sometimes gets frightened with the idea of the time when Nisha would leave, but it is Premnath, who makes her understand to feel happy with what they have instead of weeping for it. Nisha was carried back to her house from her aunt’s house. Her mother knows very well that Nisha would not be given proper attention in her house but she seems unable to raise her voice against it and finally Nisha made to return home. Rupa who was sad regarding the future of Nisha, thinks, “God knew what use an Education would be to girl from a trader family, one who was only going to marry and produce children.”\textsuperscript{22} Rupa comes out as an independent woman who favours for the upliftment of woman by giving her good education. As she says, “if anything happens in the girls later life, she is not completely dependent.”\textsuperscript{23}

The other character Sunita has been portrayed in a very heart-rending way. She appears as a victim. She has been tortured by her husband. She was not allowed to visit her parents’ house even after their request after request. Sunita tries to bear all the tortures silently. It only comes to light when Sona, with Yashpal, goes on a visit to her house. She gets her know that her husband tortures her because of his unsatisfied greed for dowry. But Sunita refuses to exploit her father, no matter what her husband’s demands were. Finding herself unable to face or to oppose it all, she only wishes to leave the world, that is fulfilled with her death that was an accident in name only. In reality it was a murder by her husband. The news of her death was unbearable for her mother who expresses her deep sorrow with her wailing and lamentation.
Nisha is the most promising character in the novel. She in comparison to other characters is seen as more assertive who makes an effort to make a proper place for herself by demanding a change for women in the patriarchal society and pivotal in the novel. N.S. Warake rightly observes:

The novel Home is a portrayal of Nisha, as a new woman, a more assertive, self-assured; and confident one. By equally footing with men, she proclaims her womanhood in a bold manner. As a young college girl, she applies her power to work as businesswoman. Her quest for identity, as Sehgal comments, is a, “whole her look at women- not as the property of father, husband or son….” (Sehgal, Sunday Standard)- And she is really the representative of new women in the millennium.24

One thing that Kapur has discussed in the most of her novels is that as soon as a girl is born, the members of the family starts thinking about her marriage that is inseparable from dowry. As she tells about the new born baby Nisha “with this gold Nisha’s dowry was begun.” 25 For Nisha the four walls of a house are confined place because she is a girl. “It is better for girls to remain inside.”26 She keeps on questioning, but Sona tries to get her agree to remain in the house by making her understand that it is better for beauty. She wished to play outside as she says, “I want to play in the park”. but she became reconciled to preserving her clothes and complexion by playing board games with her grandfather.27

Sona herself is a traditional woman and wishes her daughter to be one. Nisha is supposed to be groomed as a traditional woman who is supposed to think only about her duty of getting married and start doing something about it as have to fast for her future husband, though she was only ten years old. There is similarity between Virmati and Nisha because both start protesting against the traditionalism imposed
on them: she is opposed to fast, she says, “Why should I? That’s for older woman;” 28 Her mother keeps on giving explanations, “What a kind of wife you are going to make if you can’t bear to fast one day a year for your husband?” Reply of Nisha, “I don’t want to marry.” 29

Nisha, a ten year old girl is forced to observe the fast of Karvachauth along with Sona, Sushila and Asha. The story that is told during the fast of Karvachauth declared the fault of the woman who breaks her fast without noticing the properly that whether it was moon or lightened diya lighted by her brothers who were shown unable to bear their sister fasting for such long time. The ten years old Nisha protests when the woman is punished without for no fault. She says, “It was not the girl’s fault, it is the brothers who should be punished. They made her a widow.”

Nisha gets an encouragement from her aunt Rupa who teaches her to be independent like herself. She returned home, her studies were ignored and she was taunted for paying too much attention to studies and having no skill at kitchen work. Sona says like Kasturi: “What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful her entire life….This is a life of a woman to look after her home, her husband, her children and give them food, she has cooked with her own hands. Next you will be saying she should hire a servant.”

Nisha does not feel happy after returning home. She is given proper attention and love from her aunt and uncle and lives a life that was full of appreciation and encouragement all that were lost when she returned home. She is now taught to live a life by following tradition. Sona herself is living a life of traditional wife and daughter-in-law and wishes to give the same to her daughter Nisha. As the novelist writes, “Sona was making up for negligent upbringing. Nisha needed to be grounded in the tradition that would make her wife worth having. The art of service and
domesticity should shine in her daughter so brightly that she would over come her negative karma to be a beacon in her married home."

There is focus on Vat Savitri Puja. Here Kapur narrates the story of Savitri and presents this legend to show how a woman since time memorial is supposed to be the idol of sacrifice. Nisha does not giving time and attention to studies and the result was that she starts giving bad results and in class eleventh she gets two compartments. It makes her uncle and aunt very sad. Nisha does good in board examination but she is a girl, so it is thought that there is no need to allow her for higher studies.

But Nisha’s firm inclination towards studies, and support of her aunt and father opens a way for her to continue her studies further. Here the character of Nisha has been presented modern unlike her mother Sona. She does not hesitate to go against her mother when she tries to impose her tradition on her.

In Nisha we can get the glimpse of Virmati for her interest in studies. Both aspire for higher studies. But at the same time both get their graphs down as they become college going. Virmati’s performance goes down because of her involvement with Harish and Nisha because she is made involved in household chores well as little interest of her family for her studies. She could not think for a job like other has one of her friends Pratabh wishes for a job in police. But for Nisha: “any prospect of work was equivalent to going to the moon.”

When Nisha enters college, she finds herself inclined towards other things apart from studies. She gets attracted towards a boy who she meets often in bus for her college. This is Suresh who is also attracted to Nisha. A normal conversation starts the relationship between them. She is encouraged by Pratibha to express her liking for Suresh. Nisha feels herself independent and free to do in her college hours. She
wants to live her life independently. She has a feeling of independence like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*. She does not want to live like her mother who always tries to be traditional, living according to patriarchal society that has decided women’s place is home.

Nisha keeps on meeting with Suresh. During exam time she feels nervous. But all goes well when she is helped by Suresh with notes from St. Stephen’s tutorials and she gets first division in exam. Nisha starts to feel uneasy because she is unable to meet Suresh during holidays but she keeps on her conversation with Suresh through phone calls.

In college the teachers are seen amazed with Nisha who gets first division because though intelligent she could not maintain her image as a meritorious girl in college. Nisha is seen sure of getting married with Suresh as she had heard about the love marriage of her parents. The meeting continued during second year. They started spending too much time with each other and coming close to each other.

Nisha’s story is narrated further. She was now in her B.A. Her relationship with Suresh continued. Now she finds it difficult to concentrate on study. She needs a short cut way to pass. She again demands coaching notes from Suresh who had helped her with this earlier and made it possible for her to secure a position in college. Nisha was now in B.A. third year. Nisha agrees to go with a Suresh to the house of a friend of Suresh. At first, when Suresh tries to come close to her she pushes him away. But the emotional conversation that ensues and both expresses love for each other. Nisha agrees to spend some hours in a room of Suresh’s friend, at Vijay Nagar that allows them to come close physically. She shares about her affair with Suresh with her masi who gusses about the rage of Sona when she would come to know. In the traditional Indian society, love marriage is always seen as bad
thing. The sequence of the affair was that Nisha was scolded for her action. Here she comes out “difficult daughter” like Viramati in Difficult Daughters. She suffered the same result of her affair as done with Viramati. She turned as stain on family:

She moved like guilty thing among them, worse than the dirt under their feet. She was not allowed upstairs. There is no need to give your Sushila Chachi an opportunity to pump you.”

When investigation is done, it is found that Suresh is a Paswan, which is considered of low caste. In traditional Indian society, the inter caste marriage is considered as a crime and its results more destructive. Kapur has dealt with the traditional Indian society and modern Indian society where the third generation demands for change and wants that the second generation comes out from this narrow mentality. As Nisha says, “Who cares about these days? What you really want is to sell me in the market; she sobbed with indignant emotion. Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for?”

Nisha’s depression makes her decide to destroy to her life by neglecting herself and her education made her family to allow her meeting with Suresh but only in the company of Raju and her uncle Premnath. She still expects a change of heart in her family that would be in her favour. But it is vain. All her hope is dashed, when she meets Suresh and heard him ask to forget him forever:

“I will do whatever is best for everyone. I can have nothing to do with Nisha against her family’s wishes, no matter what my personal inclinations may be.” Raju stared at him. Suresh elaborated: “My family feels the same”. It made Nisha to break down completely: She was a fool not to have seen it earlier.
It was not easy for her to make her to accept that Suresh had done with her. So she meets another meets Suresh once more with the help of her masi Rupa. After this meeting, she comes to know that Suresh breaks off because he is afraid of her family, who can harm him and his family. Nisha is haunted by memories of her encounter with Suresh in Vijay Nagar that once appeared to her as immorality. But when she compared it what Vicky, her cousin, had done to her body in her childhood days, it came out as love, nothing else. She appears in her third year examination, haunted with the memories of Suresh. It was suspected that she would try to meet Suresh, so Raju is sent with her to keep an eye on her. She expected Suresh would come to meet her because of his love for her. But, it this does not happen. She took her first examination with doubts to get it cleared. She meets meeting Suresh again, in hopes to come to know about his decision clearly. But his decision is the same that he is not going to get married to her.

Her affair with Suresh is at an end, Nisha’s parents start to search a boy for her. The family of the boy comes and Nisha is displayed before them. But all goes wrong when she is rejected by them because it was informed that she is of immoral character. It is the time when she is again scolded by her mother who says, “Are you satisfied, madam? She demanded: this is what your roaming around has done. This is way people talk. Are you pleased with our humiliation.”  

Now instead of thinking about the happiness of her daughter, she only thinks to get her married. Is this not that a daughter is supposed to be a burden for parents? It was the whole business of her family to get her married anyhow. So, now advertisement was given about Nisha to search a groom for her. Nisha was suffering from skin disease for long. She remains at home all the time. Now she starts to think about her herself; to do something that would make her independent. First she talks
with her aunt Rupa to help her in her business. But she does not allow because she thinks that it does not suits her. Now shares her idea to her father. Her father co-operates her by saying that, “Let me see beti, let me think, ” Soon it is suggested that she works in a school that she, at first, rejects but later on accepts it as a time pans and it would make it possible to come out from house. Yashpal, now the head of the family, thinks that he is doing something untraditional that was never allowed in his family, as novelist writes, “The woman of the house had never worked. Not one. And here he was sending his beloved daughter out into the world because she did not have her own home to occupy herself with.38

She starts her career as a teacher in a school called Playway. Pooja, sister-in-law, does not like her and Nisha too does not like her. Whenever Nisha tries to touch her baby she tries to get it away from her touch. She discusses about it with her mother but all goes in vain. Now she feels, her negligence can only be ended with her marriage. She used to managed situation and suppress her anguish. Now she gets a new idea to do a business; to make salwar suits. She, as she knew her father has always helped her, shares this thought with her father. She wishes to be independent. The confidence that she has, is shown in these lines:

She would be better than Pooja. She would not only be the daughter of a prosperous man, but be responsible for wealth herself. After all, her father’s blood flowed in her, the blood of traders.39

Whenever a girl tries to carve her own path in life she is seen as doing something more sympathetic instead of seeing it as an act of confidence. As Nisha’s aunt, who had started her business of pickles to make her miserable childless life filled with some work that could make her busy, thinks:
Her aunt listened and gave no indication of the tears in her heart. Her poor, poor Nisha, forced to new her own path in life. What kind of Karma had the girl come with? 40

This act of Nisha also gets full support by her uncle Pyarelal when told by her father Yashpal. With her hard work Nisha had made other realize that with will power anybody can succeed in business, no matter if she is a girl. Nisha’s independence had made her strong. She became ready for marriage but there was a condition that she put before her parents that she needed a husband and family who would let her work. Her mother’s rage again started coming out with such condition. But she gets support with her father. One thing that we notice is that Kapur has introduced some men who are found ready to support women for there upliftment. Undoubtedly, it is a message from Kapur that there is need of such men in their life and upliftment are possible.

The marriage of Nisha with Arvind got fixed. Arvind the bride groom and his mother were ready with Nisha’s condition to let her work even after the marriage. Nisha became ready to get married with Arvind whom he found fit only because he would let her work and she could be independent even after her marriage. The hard work of Nisha had made others realize that she had potential to run a good business, as the novelist writes, “After many years the girl was doing as expected. Nisha was their precious daughter,”41

Soon after the marriage and her responsibility regarding her mother-in-law made her give scant attention on her business. This is followed by her pregnancy. She had to hand over the business to Pooja with the name ‘Pooja’s Collection’ but with the hope and assurance given by her husband that she would start a new business with a shop near her home soon.
The other character Asha, wife of Vicky, is docile and obedient as a daughter in law is supposed to be. She think it as her fate to live life in the barasti without demanding for the betterment to husband. She had no airs, no graces she was humble, obedient and helpful. Asha suffers a lot being the wife of a man who does not open his eyes towards the responsibility given to him after his marriage. Asha is devoid of love of a husband for which every wife long for. She is neglected by the other members of the family because she is the wife of Vicky who himself has no importance in the house. She suffers a lot and bear the indifference showed for her. She devoted herself in the service of the members of the family in the hope to get love and becomes stronger when she gives birth to boy-child but her hope has no consequences. She longs for all the pleasures and importance a girl dreams of before her marriage. But Asha gets nothing. She feels sorry at her miserable condition living on the terrace in a hot room with her child Virat and devoid of all the luxuries and even a proper place to live in. One threat that a bride is given most of the time by her husband whenever she demands for anything, is to send her back home – home she belongs to before marriage. So Asha comes out an adjustable woman who is ready to compromise with his husband anyhow. The life of Asha in the house is described, when the novelist writes, “From morning to night she was in the kitchen, chopping, cleaning, cooking meals, making drinks and snacks. She was twenty three and her youth would soon fade.”

Asha, wife of Vicky who is compromising since the day she came to house. She is living life on the terrace. When she heard about the plan of Pyarelal to construct a new house with different floors, she felt happy with the expectation one for her and her family. She shared this with Vicky who reacts negatively. But still Asha hopes for the better future:
…Asha went on, in an effort to bolster her wavering confidence that their future was going to change for the better.\textsuperscript{43}

Here one can see very clearly that she is one who hopes for the betterment but without raising her voice. She comes out very clever when she insists that Vicky not to be ready to leave before the new house is about to be constructed. It makes Vicky to claim for his right who devoted all his life in the service of his mother’s family.

The next, though minor character is Rekha. She was praised as so sweet so unspoiled, so loving who remained silent always. On the other hand Nisha considered herself modern because she did not want to be praised for these qualities because she believed because these things do not make a woman modern. She says, hers would be a modern relationship. Gone were the days when woman needed to be silent. And anyway silence in itself was a subversive activity. Now starts the life of Rekha with Ajay who finds her life very difficult to adjust, first with one bathroom. She does give a kind reply from her husband when she shows her difficulty regarding this. As he says, “Why did you get me married, if there is no place to even pee; complained Vijay, who had no problem peeing before his marriage.\textsuperscript{44}

The next character is Pooja. She because of her attitude does get love from the members of the family. Sona always gets disturbed with the family affairs. Now she finds its unbearable how Pooja, instead of sitting together with the members of family as all daughter in-laws used to do, is always found with Raju in her bedroom. Now Pooja who wishes to share her happiness only with her husband is seen.

It seems an integral part of the thesis to deal with the male characters too along with the female because where men are seen helpful towards women, the lives of women are better than the women who are tortured by the male members. For example- the husband of Rupa who helps her in her business as well as her father-in-
law and brother-in-law. But, on the other hand, there is Sunita who is tortured by her husband Murali that ends in her death. The other character BanwariLal, the patriarch of the family is seen not cruel yet authoritative with a desire to have control over the lives of the members of the family. As Kapur writes in the very starting of the novel that that joint family was to run according to his wishes.

But in all her novels, there are many male characters who are presented in supportive role. Whether it is the character of Yashpal, Sona’s husband or PremNath, Rupa’s husband both are seen loving and caring for their wives. Kapur writes about PremNath, “He was trying to console her. Her husband was a decent man, never throwing her barrenness in her face. May be she should also fast and pray like her sister. But she had always loved eating, and her husband loved to eat with her.”

The character of Murli is very depressive. He is a money minded man who has no love for his wife as well as for his son Vicky. When Vicky is returned to him he expresses his unwillingness to accept him. Vicky does not like him though he was his father. He remained obstinate in keeping himself away from his father who tries to beat him, and insists to live with the family of his grandfather Banwarilal. Banwarilal’s death was shock to everyone of the family. Everyone ponders over his nobleness and honesty.

The character of Premnath is presented a very thoughtful. He is in favour of education for girl. As he cares more about Nisha. He gets infuriated when he hears that Nisha is supposed to be get married at the age of seventeen. But he has no right to interfere with the decision taken about her life.

The other male character Yashpal is also gentle. He is the supporter of woman’s upliftment. He does not feavour for the marriage of Nisha at the age of seventeenth.
The importance of a son in Indian family is seen generally. Sona’s delivery of a girl does not seem as blessed as the delivery of a son. The very lines that Kapur writes give light on this concept, “Five months later Sona delivered her son. That moment on the hospital bed she experienced as the most blessed of her life. The mother of a son; she could join Sushila as a woman who had done her duty to the family, in the way the family understood it.” The importance of a son is more than a girl became it continues the line of family. This narrow thinking is prevailing in Indian society throughout. Banwarilal’s family had sons but the grand-lady of the family wishes to have both of her sons blessed with son as she says “Both sons should be able to hold their, “headhigh”, not only one. Now the older one has a complete family I can die in peace.

The question of gender discrimination is the key point that every feminist, writer discusses and Kapur is no exception. A girl from the very beginning is taught to feel herself different from the other gender called male. At the time of admission, it is the point of consideration to get Nisha admitted in a girls school because she should be traditional in upbringing and it would keeps her away from the exposure to boys. The two worlds have been already constructed, one for male and other for female. But the question is why? Why are they forced to think themselves different from each other? They have different bodily structures so they are different? The need of time is to wipe out this narrow thinking of difference and make girls feel that both genders are same and are free to live their lives on the same level. But in the most houses a girl always has to accept that as she is a girl so she does not do certain things. If we want to uplift woman from we should give proper opportunity to our children, whether it is boy or girl to make them feel that they are equal.
Kapur has dealt with issue of joint family that always demand for adjustment and does not allow one to think about himself/herself independently, and if anyone does it, he or she is considered rebellious to the family norms talking about adjustment in joint family, a dispute starts between Yashpal and Pyarelal . Yashpal did not agree with Pyarelal’s plan who then tried to make his bhabhi agreed. She expresses her ignorance in the matter but indirectly happy with the house Pyarelal planned.
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11 Ibid., 34.

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23 Ibid., p., 139.


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44 Ibid., p., 167.

