CHAPTER - 2

HOME AND BEYOND

Home, for a woman, is considered to be a place which is guided primarily by duty and traditions and a woman in an orthodox society is expected to learn and practice the art of service and domesticity above everything else. Guided broadly by the basic principle of ‘all for one and one for all,’ there is little space in a home for an individual, particularly for a woman, to be able to exercise her autonomy and choice. Under such circumstances, adjustment and compromise sum up the essence of home where family interests prevail over personal choices. Home in Asian societies is also a place where prime duty of a girl is to marry and produce children and thus carry the lineage forward. A married woman without a child is considered inauspicious, is a burden to the family and is vulnerable. Ismat Chughtai, in one of her story namely “A Morsel,” while writing about the plight of unmarried women, says, “What helplessness! If you weren’t married you were like an open wound; people tormented you with talk about possible cures, and then once you had found a husband there was talk of having children...” (130).

Home in our society is also a place where son-preference and daughter aversion is a common practice and where daughter’s children are much lesser in status than that of the son. In a traditional set up, it is the ‘duty’ of a wife to produce a male heir through whom descent and inheritance is traced. It is the male heir who traditionally provides additional power, authority and confidence to a female and the whole family. Home is also a place where a girl is not necessarily safe and secure since, many a times; she is sexually assaulted and abused inside her home only. It is a place where cooking food is considered more important for a girl than studying since her real education is believed to be in kitchen. A woman is not permitted to take her own decisions and any kind of exercise of her choice shakes the very foundations of home. Hierarchy and power equations too play a very significant role inside home and control over woman’s body is as important as control over resources, since the whole concept of family and community honor rests on the chastity of a woman. It is for all these reasons that a woman with modern sensibility strives for her space, dignity and status within and outside the domestic boundaries. She tries to assert herself and struggles to achieve independence in matters related to education, marriage, career and social
status. The fight for this autonomy begins within home and goes on to include a larger social arena. She also strives to achieve economic independence as this alone can liberate her from all kinds of financial subjugation and enable her to exercise her agency in matters related to head and heart.

The present chapter would focus on condition of women protagonists at home as presented by both the novelists in their respective works, with emphasis on those domestic issues that define the status and shape the consciousness of the female characters. It would also attempt to explore the efforts made by these women characters to transcend the boundaries of home, so as to create a space of their own in terms of having control on their body, mind and spirit. Further, the present chapter will also find out how these women confront the emotional pulls and pressures and then go beyond it to chart out a terrain that can help them “to step out of the framework defined by men and patriarchal values” and “to identify a tradition of their own” (Jain 50).

Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* is a significant novel in the sense that it attempts to depict a woman’s struggle for autonomy and individual freedom as invariably linked up with larger issues of social and political struggle. Written in the background of country’s freedom struggle from British rule, the novel makes a powerful statement as to how women are ‘moving out of the house’ to take active part in the social and political cause, since social participation and economic independence alone can lead to their actual liberation. The writer employs a female figure, Ida to narrate India’s history of freedom struggle, and running parallel to it is the story of her mother Virmati’s struggle for freedom and identity.

Through the women of three generations, Kasturi-Virmati-Ida, and Virmati as the central protagonist, Manju Kapur reveals the life circle of a woman whose whole life is dedicated to the well being of her family and yet, she is unable to find a purpose and identity of her own. Virmati, being the eldest child, even at the tender age of ten, was always loaded with the ‘weary work’ of running the house and looking after her brothers and sisters like a ‘second mother’ since Kasturi was constantly sick. Yet Virmati did not share a warm bond and desperately yearned for affection from her mother that must be given to her as a child. She always looked for “some signs that she was special” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 6) but it was a useless search, “as the language of feeling had never flowed between them” (Grewal 58). It goes to Virmati’s
credit that in spite of handling all kinds of responsibilities at home and social pressures related to early arranged marriage, she could go beyond patriarchal control to complete her education and become a teacher. Yet, home becomes a site of her constant conflicts as she fails to find affection and respite within its boundaries.

Virmati, as a woman, is conscious of her rights along with her duties and her protests are visible in her conversations with her mother, right from childhood. She questions her mother Kasturi, for being always loaded with sibling’s responsibilities, “Why does it always have to be me?” (Difficult Daughters 6). This is precisely the home environment meted out to majority of the girls in our country, irrespective of caste, color or creed. They are supposed to learn to run the house with complete care and responsibility as this is considered a pre-requisite to marriage. Kasturi bowed under the pressure of the family to produce a male heir and becomes the target of sarcasm by those very family members. She is talked of as a woman “breeding like cats and dogs” (11). Manju Kapur writes with empathy, “How trapped could nature make a woman?” (Difficult Daughters7). Kasturi seems to be quite helpless before the social set up which gradually conditions her to believe that a woman’s only utility is to produce children and look after the family. This explains her advice to her daughter: ‘‘Hai re beti! What is the need to do a job? A woman’s shaan is in her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Shaadi (Difficult Daughters16). She finds it abnormal for Shakuntala to choose to remain single and dedicate herself fully to the service of the nation. Though Kasturi was educated but her education was restricted to finding a good match. Kasturi’s education testifies Millett’s remarks in Sexual Politics:

The education of women was not thought of as a course of study beyond the threshold level of learning, a genteel polish its major achievement. And in most cases it was deliberately cynical in its emphasis upon virtue-- a sugared word which meant obedience, servility, and a sexual inhibition perilously near to frigidity. (74)

Though Virmati was studying for her F.A. exam, yet she had to accompany her ailing mother to Dalhousie, where Kasturi is sent on the advice of the family doctor to regain her declining health. Lajwanti, Virmati’s aunt, objects to the amount of family-money being spent on Kasturi’s health and cunningly joins them to have her own share of comfortable stay at the hill-resort. Lajwanti’s irrational comparison of her
small family with Kasturi’s eleven children is a constant source of discomfort in the joint family. Such incidents show writer’s sharp perception of complexities within ‘homes’ in Indian set up. The underlying politics of home is reflected in each family member desiring for one’s own individual share and comfort under the veneer of common interests.

Virmati harbors a strong desire to be like her cousin but her mother does not approve such behavior and conduct. Shakuntala is depicted by the novelist as a bold and forward looking woman who has crossed patriarchal threshold and looks beyond the mundane to give vent to her energetic spirit, “She looked vibrant and intelligent, as though she had a life of her own. Her manner was expansive, she didn’t look shyly around for approval when she spoke or acted” (Difficult Daughters 16). But this ‘vibrancy’ and ‘intelligence’ in a woman does not go well with the concept of home and family and her mother’s worldly anxiety is clearly evident in her remarks, “When will this girl settle down? All the time in the lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences. I tell her she should have been a man” (Difficult Daughters16). The writer here hints at the internalization of patriarchal beliefs by women whose confinement to domesticity puts pressures on their daughters also to follow the same line. Virmati, on her part, is highly impressed by Shakuntala’s independent way of thinking and appreciates the fact that here was someone for whom “responsibilities went beyond a husband and children” (Difficult Daughters 17). Shakuntala warns Virmati that families can never approve a woman’s decision to stay unmarried even if it is for the sake of a larger cause:

My friends are from different backgrounds, and all have families unhappy with their decision not to settle down… we travel, entertain, follow each other’s work, read papers, and attend seminars. (Difficult Daughters 17)

Virmati’s spirit revolts and she is able to realize that, “It is useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside. To education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore colleges” (Difficult Daughters 17). This is an extremely significant aspect presented in the novel that relates to fine balancing of the inner and outer spaces in the lives of women. Manju Kapur feels that any literature by women about home and families always carries these ‘larger considerations’ related to social cause and that various events and changes in the outside world have direct impact on things going on inside the homes.
Shakuntala’s life style and work had sown the seeds of aspirations in Virmati, who during her school time, could “sense the feeling of peace that being away from home and its children brought” (Difficult Daughters 19). At times Virmati wept on account of the ‘motherly’ duties she had to fulfill and consequently failed her F.A, yet she was determined to continue with her studies. She was more inclined to follow the footsteps of her cousin Shakuntala, whereas her family wanted her to get engaged with a canal engineer and settle down. A sense of freedom that had been inculcated by Shakuntala made Virmati refuse the arranged match and she was able to convince her grandfather and father for further education. Shakuntala is one of those courageous women who could go beyond the conventional responsibilities assigned to girls and be an active agent of social change.

Lala Diwan Chand, Virmati’s grandfather, was a patriarch with a difference who governed the house on strict principles and no indulgences were permitted in his house-hold. The writer notes: “No festivals were observed not even Holi and Diwali. No fancy clothes…he knew his girls would be prized” (Difficult Daughters 23-24). He supported and allowed girls to be educated but within moral bindings where they do not forget their marital responsibilities. N.K Neb rightly observes this ‘ambivalent nature’ of family:

The ambivalent nature of Indian feminist perspective can be observed from the role of the family. Family and kinship system facilitates the perpetuation of patriarchal silencing of women by men. Women’s identity and existence remain invisible and suppressed in the name of broader family interests. But, at the same time, it is family and relationships that provide support and a sense of belonging to women. (4)

Manju Kapur thus brings to fore the limitations of the family where education for girls is merely taken as a tool to fetch good matrimonial prospects but her protagonists do not surrender so easily. The rebel in Virmati continues to protest till she is finally permitted to enter “the bastion of male learning” (Difficult Daughters 45). The restriction on woman’s independent mobility is clearly evident when Virmati, for safety purposes, is sent to Arya Samaj Collge in a horse-driven carriage, although she could have easily gone on a bicycle. While in the college, Professor Harish, an intellectual in English and Virmati get so passionately involved with each other that he pressurizes Virmati to break off her engagement. Professor Harish repeatedly
asserts his love for Virmati, though he is already married and has a caring and loving wife in Ganga. Virmati was now under tremendous strain since the “thought of marriage was always at the back of her mind, splitting her head into two socially unacceptable pieces” (*Difficult Daughters* 55).

Virmati was well aware of the reputation of her family and also of the fact that her action could have adverse effects on the marriage possibilities of her siblings, yet she listens to the voice of her heart and decides to break off with her earlier arranged knot. Kasturi, unable to bear with such defiance, “grabbed her by the hair and banged her head against the wall” (*Difficult Daughters* 59). Ruby Milhoutra here makes a very significant observation:

> Here Kasturi unknowingly becomes the voice of patriarchy. She holds those values as ideals which patriarchy has taught her to be so. And when her daughter rebels against such values, she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self. (167)

The concept of family and home is most vividly reflected in the ‘united’ response of each member of the family on Virmati’s attempt to suicide by drowning in the canal and her rescue. The writer notes: “Words broke forth...united the family talked, united, they raged and grieved, united they questioned” (*Difficult Daughters* 86). The family locked Virmati in the go-down as a measure of punishment and silently married Indumati, her younger sister to the canal engineer. Virmati’s act of refusal to marry Inderjeet was seen by the elders of both the homes as a matter of shame and therefore Indumati’s marriage to Inderjeet was “a small, brief affair” (*Difficult Daughters* 92). In spite of being terribly depressed, Virmati, in an attempt to mould this unfortunate situation in the direction of her personal growth, sought permission to continue further studies and thus makes education a vehicle for regaining her confidence and self esteem.

Virmati goes beyond home to Lahore and utilizes every opportunity there to understand the deeper meaning of life represented through the world of paintings with enlightening insights by Prof. Harish. The writer seems to endorse her inner longing for a wholesome life when she observes:
The true test of a great work is its ability to express the inner realities of life, those realities that don’t change according to time and plan, that have a universal application. (*Difficult Daughters* 131)

At the same time, the observance of strict rules within the four walls of home had a limiting impact on her psyche and she is constantly haunted by “her sense of guilt” in loving an already married man and “her fear of the family” in case she is caught (*Difficult Daughters* 131).

Swarna, another female character in the novel, is embodiment of what Virmati too aspires to become and looking at her commitment and active participation in the political scene, Virmati ponders: “This is the life I should be involved in. Not useless love and a doubtful marriage” (*Difficult Daughters* 134). Swarna’s social activities and discussions are a great source of motivation to Virmati. She craves for similar independence and individuality but is unable to resolve her dilemma and make a concrete choice between her individual craving for love and social identity. Her participation in Satyagarh movement “meant thinking of a life without marriage…it meant she would be alone, and she was not sure she was capable of it” (*Difficult Daughters* 152). She sometimes detests just going on waiting for Harish to openly recognize her as his wife and questions herself, “How long do we have to be secret man and wife, hidden from the eyes of the world. I hate it, but what can I do?” (*Difficult Daughters* 140). It is this emotional helplessness on the part of Virmati, reflected repeatedly in the novel, which constantly hinders her individual growth as well as political participation. Time and again, she tries to locate herself vis-à-vis these socially and politically active women who have devoted their whole lives for the freedom of their country:

> She sighed. They all seemed so remote from her...Am I free...but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. (*Difficult Daughters* 142)

She wonders as to “how large an area of life these women wanted to appropriate themselves” (*Difficult Daughters* 142) and burns with a strong desire to follow them and contribute devotedly for the cause of the country’s independence.
The author focuses reader’s attention on the internal struggle of ordinary woman in Virmati and her desire to spread her horizons; yet is constrained to remain within the boundaries of home and feels “that these larger spaces were not for her” (*Difficult Daughters*144). Kapur draws Virmati’s parallel in Swarna and through her speech tries to convey the larger goals that women should strive for. Swarna feels it to be a privilege “to be able to give ourselves to the unity of our country…Let the politics of religion not blind us to this fact” (*Difficult Daughters*145). Women like Swarna and Shakuntala who are committed to a political cause are not afraid of the “artificial barriers” (*Difficult Daughters*145) that have been created by the politics of power carried on by the male-dominated society to deprive women of their autonomy. Swarna’s undaunted spirit is conveyed by the writer in strongest terms when she says: “Swarna came in, humming with all the brightness of a woman who has come for fruitful engagement with the world” (*Difficult Daughters* 146). Kapur points out that such spirit and confidence in women lies unutilized and unspent. Swarna exercised her options in everything, whether it is her personal relationships, political leanings or choosing to stay in Lahore against the wishes of her parents. Swarna takes Virmati to the core meetings to expose her to the stance of enlightened women who have gone beyond the outdated dreams of servitude. She clearly hints Virmati to cross the threshold of conventions by telling her: “Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru” (*Difficult Daughters*151). Yet Virmati is unable to free herself from the trap of Professor’s love and lands herself into another unfortunate situation of unwed pregnancy.

Virmati is unable to understand how Prof. Harish, who has drawn her into this situation, chooses to keep him away from all the trouble and shame associated with unwed pregnancy and she is left all alone to bear the brunt. She was the one “whose family was to be feared, whose lover was invisible in her time of need” (*Difficult Daughters*167). Swarna and Virmati find themselves in a fix when they realize that abortion was illegal and that the doctor at the Mayo hospital will not take up the case. Virmati decides to manage it all herself and sells off her gold bangle to pay for the abortion. This reflects the capability in Manju Kapur’s protagonists to handle difficult situations on their own but it is shocking that the male partner remains indifferent and runs his family and profession without any discomfort. Virmati is deeply pained, “That a child of their union, the result of all those speeches on freedom and the right
to individuality, the sanctity of human love and the tyranny of social and religious restraints should meet its end like this!“ (Difficult Daughters 171).

The hypocrisy of patriarchal attitudes gets reflected in Professor’s complete ignorance of his responsibility as an equal partner during such difficult times. The loss of gold bangle is also not taken lightly by Virmati’s family and her father openly expresses his discomfort, “Loss of something gold could not be regarded as a mere household matter. This was business” (Difficult Daughters 174). This statement by her father clearly focuses reader’s attention on how money and business surpass all human relationships. Thus one can see Virmati caught in the web of home and its transcendence. She listens to her heart’s yearnings and crosses the threshold in marrying an already married man of her own choice. Though she is bruised and wounded in the journey of life, yet has the satisfaction of living life on her own terms. The novel moves forward at the level of India’s fight for freedom against the British Raj as well as at the level of Virmati’s conflict to live life according to her own ways. Annie John says:

As readers we begin to sympathize with Virmati even through her forbidden love affair; India’s victory is mirrored through Virmati’s life. No doubt India attained freedom but at the cost of partition and communal hatred. Virmati was victorious in breaking the age old shackles of a country which is tradition bound but at the cost of much mental, torture and the tag of being the ‘other.’

(7)

Virmati refuses to accept many traditionally endorsed norms designed and reinforced by patriarchy for women’s subjugation and struggles to search for new forms and meanings of life free from colonial and patriarchal bounds and expectations. Her quest for learning and teaching proves to be a ‘civilizing influence’ on her and opens up new vistas of life. Her simultaneous craving for love, however, along with her consistent emotional dilemma over personal and social space, traps her into a situation which leaves her shattered and lonely. Life comes full circle for her as she realizes the futility of ‘petty domestic matters’ towards the end of the novel at the time of partition when the ‘nation is on trial.’ She at last resolves to merge herself into the spirit of the nation: “I have tried adjustment and compromise, now I will try non-cooperation” (Difficult Daughters 259). She is eager to help the people staying in camps but her physical condition of pregnancy does not permit her to contribute actively and with
communal frenzy at its peak, she had to be shifted to her mother’s place for safe delivery of the child. She does donate all her clothing to the distressed people staying in camps. Ironically, Virmati is able to get her personal space “for which she had fought all along” (Difficult Daughters 274) by being confined to her house at a critical time when the whole nation was burning. She felt strong with the knowledge of her pregnancy and the “certainty of the nascent life within” (Difficult Daughters 274). Virmati gives birth to a baby girl and wanted to associate her arrival with the birth of a new country by naming her “Bharti” but Harish prefers to call her ‘Ida’- which meant “a new slate, and a blank beginning” (Difficult Daughters 277), signifying a completely new beginning for the child without any kind of linkages with the past events at the personal or political level.

As a writer, Kapur in her interview with Ira Pandey tells that she has always been interested in depicting the lives of women in domestic as well as socio-political terrains. In writer’s own words:

One of the main preoccupations in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both inner and outer spaces in their lives-what sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning and at what cost to their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home. (Kapur 2003)

The writer’s deep engagement with women’s need for self-fulfillment, autonomy and self-realization is amply demonstrated in Virmati and other women characters who crave to lead a socially and politically meaningful life. As Rao observes:

*Difficult Daughters* represents the emergence of new woman who is no longer the chaste wife whose suffering can only make her more virtuous, the nurturing mother who denies her own self, the avenging Kali or a titillating strumpet. (242)

Manju Kapur in one of her interviews states that through the story and character of Virmati, she wanted to explore as to “why it is with educated women that their emotional lives are so messed up” (Kapur 2010). Seen in the light of emotional conflict, Virmati’s quest appears real and so are the outer and inner challenges, the traditional and modern forms of oppression and repression and her responses at various points of her journey. It would not be appropriate to undermine her struggle
against patriarchal beliefs and structures. As one of the critics, Gur Pyari Jandial points out: “What is necessary is to break the patriarchal mould and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement” (3).

This desire of woman protagonist to explore vast arena beyond ‘home’ and the spirit to realize one’s real self continues in Kapur’s next work A Married Woman. The novel explores Astha’s longing for more space within and outside home through a larger commitment in life against the backdrop of Indian sectarian politics. The problems, insecurities and unrest faced by middle class women are juxtaposed with similar situation faced by the nation, both being at the verge of transition. The novel revolves around Astha, the protagonist, who is the only child of her parents and hence, is brought up in an over-protective manner with utmost concern for her education, health, or marriage.

Asthā’s mother is traditional in certain respects and believes in the ritual of fasting for procuring a suitable match for her daughter but Astha while closing her eyes in the mode of praying visualized “images of a romantic, somewhat shadowy young man holding her in his strong manly embrace” (Kapur, A Married Woman 1) Astha also rebels against the use of force by her father to make her excel in studies and does not like to be constantly reminded about the amount of money being spent on her education. She is terribly shocked at the bitter reality of being slapped by her father for showing her resentment, with her mother too justifying the action taken by her father: “Why don’t you do the work he tells you to do? You can’t be drawing and painting all the time” (A Married Woman 3). The incident clearly shows that the money spent on the education of a girl child is expected to be paid back with excellent results, which is not the case with a male child.

Asthā’s life, inside the home, was governed by strict code of conduct, with a rigorous routine to be followed daily which included going for a walk with her father who expected a very high standard of performance in matters related to her studies and general conduct. He encouraged her to sit for competitive exams as he strongly believed that “with a good job comes independence” (A Married Woman 4). Asthā’s mother was very cautious of her growing interest in a young neighborhood Army cadet Bunty and not only warns her for indulging in a romantic affair but also becomes instrumental in breaking off the relationship. The seeds of rebellion can be seen sprouting in Asthā at a very early stage in her parental home and she was
infuriated to discover her mother’s intervention in her personal matter: “How dare her mother interfere in her friendship?” (A Married Woman 15). Subsequently, on finding that Bunty also agreed to give up the relationship ‘so easily’ without any kind of communication with her, she decided not to pursue it any further. Astha hated the idea of exhibiting herself as a doll to any suitor and when confronted with such a situation, she locks herself in the bathroom and refuses to come out in spite of her mother’s persistent requests and threats. Her irritated mother finally leaves her alone and Astha kept crying: “Crying for Bunty, crying for the lack of love in her barren life, crying because she didn’t want to see a dull stolid man in the drawing room” (A Married Woman 21).

Asthag again protested when her mother tried to question her feelings for another man, as expressed in her diary: “You have no right to read my diary” (A Married Woman 26). She takes it as an encroachment by her mother in her personal space and could not tolerate it. Manju Kapur depicts protagonist’s growth from Virmati’s emotional instability to Astha’s mature understanding of inter-personal relations in a well marked manner. Astha, on being cheated by her boy-friend Rohan, tells him directly: “If you don’t want to talk to me, just say so. Don’t look for excuses” (A Married Woman 28). On hearing that Rohan is going abroad for further studies, she could sense that he wished to get rid of her and reflects her contempt in the form of a very cold response to his departure. Coming back home, she locks herself in the bathroom away from the domestic as well as outer world in order to muster up her inner strength to come to terms with the heart-wrenching pain. She prefers to go through her pain all alone and is in no mood to share her feelings with her parents.

Asthag was pursuing her Masters in English literature when her parents suggest a marriage proposal from a foreign returned M.B.A boy named Hemant. She makes her opinion clear that she would like to talk to him first before taking any final decision. So it is quite evident that Astha is very frank with her parents and voices her anger, protest or joy without any hesitancy and thus is more evolved than Virmati in Difficult Daughters. Ashok Kumar pertinently observes: “Asthag is the heroine who carries the fight of Virmati to new battlegrounds” (47). She relates to her parents on friendly terms in matters of her education, marriage or personal space. She has the guts to live her life all alone if not suitably married but does not believe in undue compromises. When her father casts aspersions on the integrity of Vaderas, the prospective suitor’s
family, her mother is angry about his idealism but Astha is able to understand her father’s concerns and says: “Papa, if you don’t think it is a good idea, I won’t meet the boy…I will look after myself” (A Married Woman 34). This approach to life reflects her capacity to assess the situation in a balanced manner and her ability to decide for herself. Astha is finally married to Hemant and in course of time gives birth to two children, a daughter and a son. Her duty as a wife seemed fulfilled with the birth of a male heir.

Asth a had everything from the point of view of a happy family life that a woman could desire for, yet her inner discontent makes her take up a teaching job in a nearby school. Her father had suggested going for journalism as she had a flavor for writing and painting but Hemant did not like it. Fed up with her conventional married life, she tries to find refuge in the social cause introduced to her by a theatre personality Aijaz Akhtar Khan who gives Astha a taste of the life outside home and family and gradually socializes her thinking. In case of Virmati, the spirit of her personal love had overpowered her social spirit but this unfulfilled desire of Virmati to rise above the personal to serve the society is carried forward by Astha. Aijaz, a secular Muslim involved in ‘Street Theatre group,’ who was invited by the Principal of the school where Astha worked, asked her to write a script on the burning issue of Ram Janambhoomi and Babri Masjid to be dramatized in school. This responsibility gave her a sense of purpose that she earlier lacked. She felt extremely happy that someone has trusted and valued her abilities which hitherto went completely unnoticed within domestic boundaries. Aijaz rouses her interests in the ongoing socio-political activities which, after Aijaz’s murder, almost become a passion for her.

Asth a, who had enough spare time at home because her husband is always occupied with his business pursuits, tried to fill her time and inner void with sketching and poetry; writing about love, rejection, desire and longing. Writing poems helped her to give vent to her pent up feelings because, “discussing her feelings with Hemant usually led to argument, distance and greater misery” (A Married Woman 79). Astha had a collection of around two hundred poems authored by her that she now wished to get published and thus make her-self more expressive and productive. As a result she typed and revised her work with great zeal, but Hemant’s view that her poems were too bleak leave Astha totally despondent, so much so that she withdrew from expressing herself in words and took to sketching. She tried to keep her spirit alive by
thinking that: “May be one day she could do something with her art but for now her school and her -self were audience enough” (A Married Woman 82). Hemant’s response to Astha’s writing skills subtly exposes the male ego that fails to acknowledge a woman’s potential.

When Astha expresses her desire to bring the twelve boxes of books from her parents place since her mother was retiring to Rishikesh, her husband’s response is too drag and insulting. The resultant argument between the husband and wife clearly points out how little a space a woman is allotted in the marital house in spite of all her devotion, obligation and duties towards home and a marriage. Hemant suggests her not to be so fussy and ‘sentimental’ about storing books and donate them to the library instead. Astha is surprised to find that books were shifted to the library even before she could come to know of it. She expressed her indignation with her mother, who too supported Hemant’s opinion saying: “People don’t live in their things beti. Besides, added the mother, it is Hemant’s house and he said there was no room”. Astha resentfully questions: “Then who am I? A tenant?” (A Married Woman 87). This expression of resentment is a pointer that Kapur’s women do not take things lying down and strive hard to realize their due space inside as well as outside home.

After staying with Astha for a while, Astha’s mother left for Rishikesh to spend the rest of her life in an ashram and Hemant was least concerned about this decision. As his attitude hardened, she now realized that her mother had been right in thinking that it is not proper to live with her daughter. This stance is reflective of the conventional thinking that parents from a woman’s side cannot share home and food from the marital homes of daughters and for the first time Astha wished “she had a house that was more clearly hers” (A Married Woman 89). Astha being the only child cannot leave her mother unattended and soon visits her along with the children to convince her to stay with her in her house instead of living in an ashram. She clearly tells her mother: “It is my house too. If people mind it is just too bad. I don’t believe in all this shit about parents being the responsibility only of the sons” (A Married Woman 94). This is reflective the growing awareness among women of their inherent strength and capability to handle all kinds of responsibilities.

Astha’s mother, being conventional, accorded more respect to Hemant as her son-in-law and therefore handed over the money received from the sale of her house to him rather than to her daughter. Astha was aghast at her decision and confronts her mother
saying: “Really, Ma, don’t you think women can be responsible for their own investments?” (A Married Woman 97). She resented not being trusted by her mother, especially because the money was solely her fathers’ deposit and she believed she had every right to deal in matters concerning her parents. Astha brooded over:

If her mother was at fault, so was her father, for managing the money and teaching his wife that this was normal behavior, so was her mother-in-law for bringing up Hemant to never regard women as beings to be consulted in their own lives, so was the Swami ji for teaching that only in detachment lies happiness. (A Married Woman 98)

Asthा thus understands and questions the whole set up that is responsible for women’s secondary status and is at deep loss to realize that Hemant never understood her in the right perspective. She ponders: “What kind of fool had she been to expect Hemant to understand? She had a good life, but it was good because nothing was questioned” (A Married Woman 99). The writer here raises a very important issue that as long as there is silence and acceptability of the existing situation with regards to woman’s subjugation, everything seems good but as soon as a woman begins to question her subservience, the whole setup rises up in revolt against her motives.

Asthा’s association with Aijaz’s friend, Pipeelika Trivedi, a parallel woman character in the novel like Swarna in Difficult Daughters, proves to be a turning point in her life in the sense that as Swarna had influenced Virmati, Pipeelika also exercises great impact on Astha and helps her have a taste of life beyond the boundaries of home, particularly after the killing of Aijaz during one of the processions against the Ramjanambhoomi disputes. Her sincere involvement in spreading the message of peace in the society inspires Astha to associate herself wholeheartedly in a campaign against communalism and injustice. She becomes an active member of a group called Sampradaykta Mukti Manch which was set up in the memory of the street theatre group. It is decided that anyone equipped with art and painting should donate a painting for workers’ unity and the cause of secularism. Astha volunteers for the project with full energy and enthusiasm but is dissuaded by Hemant who did not like the idea of taking unnecessary strain for something that is not directly related to home and family. There is clear clash of perspective as Hemant begins to question her very motive for the sake of ‘some dead men.’ Astha asserts that her social engagement goes beyond ‘dead men’ to serve a particular ‘cause’ that is very dear to her heart.
Due to constant encouragement from Reshana, the convener of the *Manch*, Astha’s efforts begin to bear fruit and her painting begin to get auctioned for higher and higher price, a substantial amount of which is contributed for the cause for which *Manch* stood. Astha had great satisfaction that she could finally be involved with something that is creative. Astha’s paintings gave her social recognition as well as personal sense of satisfaction: “She wanted to say yes, I have sold my first painting, I have achieved something” (*A Married Woman* 150). It was not that Astha wanted to spoil her married life but for her, earning her own money through her paintings devoted to a cause “represented security, not perhaps of money, but of her own life, of a place where she could be herself” (*A Married Woman* 148). She was overwhelmed by the feeling that her talent which went unnoticed and unappreciated at home brought her admiration and recognition from the outside world. Arjun, the film maker, appreciated her painting saying, “I loved the emotions portrayed in your painting” (*A Married Woman* 151).

However, Astha’s need to go beyond home invited troubles inside home: “It was clear from the moment she stepped inside that she was in trouble. Hemant received her frostily, no question as to how was the meeting...are you alright...you go and lie down” (*A Married Woman* 153). This reflects family’s resentment towards a woman who wishes to explore herself or pursue her dreams through some kind of creative expression of her own. However this did not deter Astha who started sketching on a larger canvas and her painting depicting *Rath-Yatra* was priced to be sold for twenty thousand rupees. Astha was overwhelmed with raging reviews which even her husband could not ignore to notice and her self esteem is restored: “She hugged the vision of herself as a woman who had sold two paintings in one year, sum total of thirty thousand rupees, of which ten thousand was hers. She felt rich and powerful” (*A Married Woman* 159).

Now that her paintings occupied most of her time, Astha needed ‘more space’ of her own since she did not like her passion to become the subject of idle gossip with the relatives and visitors. However Hemant fails to understand and appreciate her desire for a place more specifically suited to her work and bluntly refuses it: “You don’t need more. You have all you can use here” (*A Married Woman* 156). Astha feels insulted and homeless. Hemant even objects to Astha utilizing his sister Sangeeta’s room and that too when she comes to visit them only during holidays. It is surprising
that he respects the sensitivity of her sister but cannot understand the basic needs of his wife. Even his parents objected to Astha’s occupying Sangeeta’s room as they viewed it as an encroachment on Sangeeta’s territory and even said it was another thing that servants used it off and on. The author brings to surface the hard realities of homes where domestic servants weigh more as compared to a daughter-in-law. Astha finally finds her own way of dealing with the situation: “Constantly reminded of the space nobody thought enough of her to give, she finally sealed herself; she shut the door, and if disturbed too often locked it” (A Married Woman 151).

Asthana now grew more interested in social activities of the Manch and her paintings rather than sitting idle at home or going for holidaying to Goa just because it was ‘off-season.’ Manju Kapur does not anywhere seem to deny the positive aspects that a home and family stand for. Astha is ever ready to participate in the parties where Hemant and children are interested, but she is now assured of the fact that “having something of your own makes you strong” (A Married Woman 176). The writer carries forward the concept of ‘beyond’ to include her social and political concerns against militant Hinduism and religious fanaticism. People from Sampradayakta Mukti Manch wanted Astha to make a speech as it would give voice to the women and if women begin to realize that “they have some kind of voice it will be a useful counter thrust to violence and aggression. After all they stand to lose the most” (A Married Woman 185). Astha, who was no longer teaching in a school now, found it a good opportunity to have some respite from the drudgery of routine inside the home. Though her mother-in-law did not like her involvement in social circles and firmly tells her: “it is not a woman’s place to think of these things” (A Married Woman 187) but now that she had taken the plunge, it was not possible to stop her. Hemant again objects to her suggestion of going to Ayodhya for two days and reminds her to look after the children instead. Astha was agitated since the children as well as homely duties were already being taken care of:

The things that made up her life are her home, children, husband, painting, the Sampradaykta Mukti Manch. Was it too much for a woman to handle… her children were well taken care of…she had someone who cooked better than she, she had left her teaching. And yet she was chained. (A Married Woman 190)
Her children were far more supportive. They even wished to accompany her to Ayodhya, where they knew their mother was going to make a speech. Astha did feel a bit dislocated on reaching Ayodhya and missed her children but soon regained her balance by concentrating her thoughts on the function to be held at night where, “she would make her speech, feel the purpose of her visit more” (*A Married Woman* 194). Her speech, in a ‘firm and clear’ voice, establishes the larger ‘duty’ and purpose of life:

Brothers and sisters...In essence women all over the world are the same. We belong to families. We are affected by what deflects our husbands, brothers and children...And experience tells us that where-ever there is violence, there is suffering, unnecessary and continuous suffering...History can’t be righted easily, but lives are lost easily, pain and trauma to women and children come easily. Tomorrow your sacrifice will have been forgotten, because the duty of life is towards the living. (*A Married Woman* 197-198)

Her carefully prepared speech clearly reflects her deep concerns not only for women, but for the unity and harmony of the nation and humanity at large.

Asta and Pipeelika’s gradual liking for each other, which soon flowers into another realm of relationship, is also an important facet of going ‘beyond’ the boundaries of the domesticity and orthodoxy. The lesbian relationship between the two makes their life overflow with freshness. They travel together, share intellectual ideas and seem fulfilled. Pipeelika confesses to Astha that true love, rather than being confined to body, should ensure union of souls, emotions and ideologies. Astha feels mentally stronger in the company of Pipeelika and they both undertake a long journey together in the form of an *Ekta Yatra* from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. The relation between the two could not continue for long due to Pipeelika’s decision to go abroad for her research. Yet Pipeelika-Asthha episode has its own significance in the sense that it enables Astha to experience the meaning and depth of life from an altogether different point of view- sexually and emotionally. In an interview to Ira Pandey, Manju Kapur clears all confusions about the introduction of this plot in the novel:

This relationship suggested itself to me as an interesting means of making Astha mature and change. An affair with a man would have been the classic clinch and so I ruled it out and tried out a same sex affair, I don’t know how
successful I have been nor is this based on a real life relationship. It is as I said a writer’s experiment with a lot. (2003)

Manju Kapur’s protagonist, Nisha, in her next novel Home, travels further and tries to strike her own path within the terrain of an extended family headed by Banwari Lal, a firm believer in patriarchal ways and beliefs. The writer presents here a world of joint family with its accompanying complexities of adjusting one’s aspirations and individualities with those of the others, facing challenges of generational shifts, trying to accommodate growing children in constricted personal spaces and even narrower working spaces. Manju Kapur, in her interview with J. Dadyburjor Farhad, asserts that this novel is based on real facts:

I teach in an all girls college[Miranda House College, Delhi] and ‘ Home’ was first conceived in response to the home situations of some of my students who came from conservative backgrounds. The family, I write about has had to rebuild its prosperity, having lost everything in the partition. This makes them especially vigilant that much of the family ethos is dominated by the market place. (Web)

Home, in the novel, is introduced as a place where girls face sexual abuse and might have to live with a feeling of tremendous insecurity. The incident of being seduced by her own cousin, Vicky, of almost the same age, leaves an indelible mark on Nisha’s psyche, who does not know how to respond to a situation where “the demon lay in her home” ( Kapur, Home 67). The matter is closed without punishing Vicky or even warning him and Nisha is sent to her maternal aunt’s home for a few years to avoid any further complications. The writer, through the child abuse of Nisha, brings out the bitter truth of gender based violence in the family. Stanko observes: “This physical assault endures an invasion of the self, the intrusion of the inner space, a violation of her sexual and physical autonomy” (9).

Nisha revolts against the orthodox ways of living and thinking. She registers her protest, when her mother wants her to observe fast for a future husband. When the women-folk keep fast on Karva Chauth and go through the ritual of listening to the story with full devotion, it is Nisha who questions the essence of Vat-Savitri Katha and protests, saying: “It was not the girl’s fault; it is the brothers who should be punished. They made her a widow” (Home 95). Rupa, Nisha’s Masi, does not approve
of conventional attitude of her sister Sona and ruminates: “There was an age for everything, and when the child should be thinking of studies, she was forcing her to think of husbands” (Home 95). Nisha, however, does not accept the outdated notions of her mother and demonstrates in no uncertain terms that her status as a girl cannot be reduced to a mere helper in the kitchen. In the words of Shilpi Rishi Shrivastava:

Nisha is horrified to discover that ‘her mother’s idea of a daughter was one who helped her every time anybody ate.’ Sona who is always concerned with making her daughter homely and good wife says, “That Masi of yours has ruined your head.” What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful to her entire life. (188)

Sona wants Nisha to study only for the sake of finding a suitable match as “despite the overuse of her brains, she was only going to get married” (Home121). Even her brother doesn’t see her education in the right perspective. When Nisha scores better than Raju, he says, “Nisha is a girl, she has nothing better to do then sit around and read” (Home121).

The novel thus brings to surface various barriers that deter the full growth of a woman’s intellect but Kapur’s protagonists constantly challenge the rigidity of these structural barriers with their intellectual and moral strength and succeed in carving out their own track. Home reveals a very perturbing truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity and individuality.

Nisha, inspite of undergoing the trauma of seduction at such a young age, performs very well at her studies in the scholarly environment of her maternal aunt’s home. After her grandfather’s death, Nisha is shifted back to her parental home, and she resents: “They didn’t care if she failed; they only cared if she cut ginger” (Home 125). Kitchen work is considered as a pre-requisite for the marriage of a daughter and no other achievement in any sphere can replace it for her. After much discussion and arguments within the family, Nisha is allowed to pursue higher studies in Durga Bai College which is an “on campus all girls, with a reputation of steady mediocrity. It would do nicely for a girl waiting to get married” (Home 140). While studying in a college, she fell in love with a boy who belonged to a different caste. She spent lot of time with Suresh and was filled with excitement and adventures in life, as this was her first social interaction with any male outside home. She knew that her parents would
strongly object to their secret meetings and would never allow her to marry a low-caste boy yet she continued travelling on a road where earlier protagonists had been hesitant.

Nisha goes on meeting Suresh under one pretext or the other till “they both felt a milestone has been reached enough for him to briefly touch her arm, enough for her to not pull away” (Home 146). At the same time, she is conscious of her limits and objects to physical intimacy with him until they are married. Unlike Virmati who spent years waiting to be married to Prof. Harish, Nisha is mature enough to ask her lover to send his parents to her home with a proposal and, in case Suresh is scared to tell his parents, she is ready even for a break up. This is reflective of the evolution and growth of Manju Kapur’s woman protagonists who are in the process of transcending even the emotional barriers by gaining clarity and decisiveness in matters of love.

The most powerful way in which Nisha attempts to go beyond the domestic boundaries and age old conventions is through initiating her own financial venture in spite of being married off to a manglik widower, Arvind, who runs his own business. Nisha’s autonomous self is evident even before she is married when she approached her father for support in her business in bridal Shalwar suits. Nisha was the first woman in the merchant family who had stepped outside home as a way of fulfilling her dreams and entered the area of business which, till then, was considered only a male domain. She named her boutique ‘Nisha’s Creations’ and within a few months, her business soared to great heights. It surprised her father to see her doing even better than his son Raju. Later, owing to marriage and pregnancy, she had to reluctantly hand over the business to her sister-in-law Pooja, who too was inspired to go for it only because she had seen Nisha making her own money and finding her own space. Thus, Nisha’s flair for business and intellectual make up does not lose its edge even after marriage and added responsibility of looking after the children and family. It is evident that she will again prove her mettle as and when there is right time and opportunity for it and achieve her actualization of self.

This striving for her personal space within home boundaries and beyond is carried forward by Kapur’s next protagonist Nina in The Immigrant. She is associated with teaching profession in a women’s college, Delhi and like Virmati, is attracted towards Rahul in the Arts faculty. She is, however, soon disappointed, as: “she was looking for love on her own terms, untainted by convention and respectability” whereas
Rahul, “wanted to have his cake and eat it too” (Kapur, *The Immigrant* 6). Nina, being a very self respecting woman, refused to meet Rahul anymore when she could not get his commitment for marriage and preferred to choose loneliness and didn’t compromise. Nina’s passion for teaching is fulfilling enough for her to lead a meaningful and contented life yet the pressures of unrelenting conventions, which consider woman incomplete without marriage, compel her to ‘settle’ in a new home after marriage. The writer gives voice to the parental concern when she says: “Nina’s mother prayed that the flow of the letters from Ananda would result in a home and happiness for her daughter. To see her well settled was her only remaining wish” (*The Immigrant* 60). Thus, a daughter’s marriage and settlement in a husband’s house constitutes the sole concept of home and family for a woman in Indian society and the after effects are often ignored. Nina is finally engaged to Ananda, a dentist in Dehradun who, after the death of his parents in a car accident, is helped by his maternal uncle (Mama) to settle in Canada as a gesture to fulfill his responsibility towards his demised sister.

By bringing in the context of Canada, the writer provides the readers with an opportunity to explore the home situations and family relations in a Western world. Ananda, who is well received by his uncle and his wife initially, is soon frankly introduced to the concept of family in Canada, as his uncle points out: “Family here means different things beta. We help you to be independent. We do not want to cripple you” (*The Immigrant* 29). Ananda’s dentist friend Gary assures him of an independent life as a boarder: “You’ll have a much better time on your own; man. One can’t have family breathing down one’s neck” (*The Immigrant* 31). This statement by the writer hints at the restricting atmosphere within Indian homes which does not leave enough scope for the family members to develop as an individual. Nina, a self- decisive kind of woman, has to discover her own private ways to give expressions to her emotions and future plans with Ananda, since this privacy was not possible inside home due to constant intrusion of her mother. She had to take her letter pad to college as she felt, “it was not easy to think at home” (*The Immigrant* 57).

Nina takes her own time and discusses with her close friend Zenobia all the pros and cons regarding her marriage with Ananda which will take her across the seas. This reflects her mature sensibility in dealing with matters of heart. Marriage is finally
solemnized but once in Canada, Ananda and Nina are soon engulfed in agonizing loneliness. Nina feels doubly marginalized within ‘home’ boundaries, living in Canada, away from her Delhi home, as she had to suffer the consequences as a woman and as an immigrant. She could find nothing constructive to engage herself in and felt trapped whiling away her time in activities like cooking food, watching television and reading magazine. She could not find those little pleasures and fun she had with her Indian friends and colleagues, since relationships in Canada were far more formal and detached. She needed more time to adjust to the alien culture in which she found herself. At times she suffered a great sense of loss of identity as she was an unknown entity here, whereas in India she enjoyed the status of a lecturer in a reputed college.

Nina, in Canada, realized how the feeling of being lonely carried a completely different meaning in a foreign country. She muses: “At home one was never really alone. The presence of her mother, the vendors who came at the door…all these had been woven into her day” (The Immigrant 159). Whereas here in Canada, loneliness engulfed her very being: “the soul destroying absence of human beings from her life…her most intense social gesture was a nod” (The Immigrant 159). The stark loneliness of a married woman in the West is emphasized with utmost intensity. Nina’s craving for home finds poignant expression when she says: “Home. That was she wanted” (The Immigrant 176). Nina tries hard to come out of her cocoon by adopting the western ways of dressing, eating and going for outings. Above all, she registers herself as a member of the library and opts for a course in library science so as to make her days meaningful. She also joins a group called La Lea League, where various issues related to women were discussed. However, her myriad attempts at assimilating into the new culture and adapting to the new home in a foreign land fail to yield satisfactory results and the news of the death of her mother aggravates the situation beyond repair.

Nina’s discovery of the sexual inadequacy of her husband and his secret visit for sex therapy make her cross the marital threshold and enter into extra marital relationship with Anton, her classmate in Library course. She is no longer restricted by the taboos ingrained in her psyche regarding morality when she finds out that apart from the sexual dysfunction, Ananda has also cheated on her by entering into physical relationship with another woman named Mandy. Unable to bear with such complete
betrayal, she finally decides to move out of her marital ties. She applies for jobs everywhere away from Halifax and from Ananda since, in her own words: “I need to be by myself” (*The immigrant* 329). With her academic record being excellent, she soon began to get very encouraging responses.

Nina’s concluding remarks on home and family serve to throw new light on the very concept of being related and together in a home, which, she feels, is not something fixed and permanent but a ‘temporary’ phenomenon and keeps evolving according to the needs and situations: “When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, and a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again” (*The Immigrant* 330). The journey of “reinventing oneself” cannot be rooted at one place or family. It has to transcend all kinds of barriers and boundaries to arrive at new definitions of home and family where every kind of interaction, relationship, ‘the sense of community’ and belongingness is temporary and short-lived. In one’s search for the self, a woman has to find different ways to belong, ways that might not be ‘necessarily lasting’ but which, nonetheless, tend to make one’s life ‘less lonely’ for a brief period of time.

This search for understanding the emerging contradictions of home and going beyond the restrictions it imposes is continued in her last novel *Custody*, where the characters of Shagun and Ishita try to inch their way ahead breaking various outdated conventions related to home and marriage. The novel successfully explores the complex terrain of home and family in particular relation to the issue of custody of children. Raman Kaushik, a marketing executive at a multinational company and Shagun, an aspiring model, were traditionally married but Raman’s intense involvement with the work in the company left him no time for the family life. All responsibility related to the bringing up of children and their education was solely taken care of by Shagun, who, many a times, felt ignored and over-burdened. The problem got compounded in the absence of the in-laws to divide their time with grand children since it was the couple’s choice to set up a nuclear home near Raman’s office.

Raman, in spite of being aware that he was “sacrificing family life for the sake of his job,” (Kapur, *Custody* 5) could not amend the whole situation as Sahgun grew more and more “sick and tired of being alone” (*Custody* 9). Consequently when Raman’s boss, Ashok Khanna, expressed his desire to feature Shagun as a housewife in one of
the advertisements needed for sale of their product, she readily agreed as she believed that this small step may lead her to further opportunities to advance in life. Since Shagun had already provided an heir to the family throne and had “gotten over the duties of heir-producing smoothly,” she now had enough time to delve into “some empty spaces in her life” (Custody 17). The attitudes which the parents and in-laws exhibit on the birth of the first child as male clearly exposes the mindset of the upper middle class society in India but Kapur’s female protagonists continue to search for something beyond the mundane that can relate to social concerns and intellectual survival.

Raman’s mother, Mrs. Kaushik had thought of living in a joint family with the son but Shagun preferred living in an independent rented house near to her mother’s place. Yet Shagun was soon oppressed due to lack of her own space in relationships: “that was the trouble with Raman- he swallowed her up, leaving no space to breathe” (Custody 49). Shagun’s subsequent physical and emotional bonding with Ashok left Raman devastated as he felt: “the sanctity of his family violated” (Custody 76). Shagun’s own mother, Mrs. Sabharwal, considered it a violation of family norms for her daughter to choose to lead a life of her own. Kapur brings out the vacillations in Shagun’s emotional state and her “joyless, dismal, uninteresting life” (Custody 106) that makes her feel suffocated in an environment that is oppressive to her physical, material or emotional needs. The writer tries to point out the gaps which need to be bridged to ensure a favorable environment at home for women so that their dreams and aspirations could find creative expression. Shagun, finding solace and refuge in her new found relationship with Ashok, aspires for freedom which was long denied to her though she was all along aware of the heavy price that she will have to pay for it. In the words of Pew Maji:

She fought for the freedom she had long wanted but it was at the cost of her children and a happy married life. She dares to come out of the protective environment of the peaceful family setup. (2)

The real battle of “traditional versus modern values, individual versus society”(Custody 84) begins with changing marital scenario with Ashok marrying Shagun and Raman’s remarriage with Ishita and the ensuing fierce legal battle over the custody of children. The writer, through her detached and neutral portrayal of the changing patterns and value system related to home, marriage, remarriage and guardianship,
provides a glimpse into the ugly realities that lie unseen behind the myths and perceptions related to ‘happy family,’ especially among middle class educated and influential families. The difficult trial through which the two children- Arjun and Roohi are made to undergo provides deep insight into the psyche and sufferings of the young children as a result of broken marriages and formation of new marital relationships. On the other hand, Ishita’s ruined marriage clearly reflects that it has not yet been possible for the traditional Indian middle class families to accept and respect a woman who is infertile, or who, for any other reason, is unable to provide a male heir, even if she happens to be an ideal wife.

The various parameters about home, family and gender have also been dealt with by Bapsi Sidhwa in her novels with all its cultural and ethnic diversity. Though cultures and communities depicted are different, ranging from Parsi culture in the plains to Kohistani culture of mountainous regions, but the rigidity of codes for women, as also their struggle against the prescribed norms, has much in common with Indian counterparts. Women in Indian societies are in a far better position as compared to their sisters in a Pakistani society since they seek and are granted more opportunities as compared to their sisters in Pakistan where it is the fundamentalists who fully control their lives. Indian women as depicted in the works of Manju Kapur are fighting for the subtler aspects of life as compared to women of Sidhwa especially in a tribal society where their struggle is for survival. A woman in Pakistani society has to lead most of her life in the home spaces segregated for women, learning the skills necessary to set up a family after marriage. In Pakistan too, it is more important for a woman to be well equipped in matters of home and hearth than related to education or social causes. It is mostly the women from higher sections of society who get the opportunity to seek knowledge in male-bastions of learning and there too, a careful watch is kept on their movement by the parents and family. She is allowed to spread her wings only up to the limit permitted by the male counterparts. In the tribal communities of Kohistan, women are considered as a saleable commodity. They are used by the warring parties to settle their disputes. Any notion of independence expressed by a woman is trampled upon with utmost cruelty. She is abused and physically violated. Even the families which seem to be quite liberal in their outlook tend to have a restricting atmosphere inside the boundaries of the homes dictated by the male authority. Women who refuse to follow the dictates have to face various
kinds of abuse and tortures. The female body becomes a site of contention within the home and outside as well, as violence is perpetuated on her body to seek vengeance by the enemies and to protect the ‘honour’ associated with family and control over woman’s chastity.

Sidhwa’s representation of home is rich and varied, with each novel representing a different dimension and conflict related to the domestic structures, ideology and mindset.

*The Crow Eaters* depicts a home headed by Faredoon Junglewalla, (to be henceforth referred as Freddy) the patriarch, who is a proud father of seven children, four daughters and three sons. Putli, his wife, children and other family members see him with awe and respect, but his mother-in-law is always at loggerheads with him. This is a traditional home where the patriarch rules and guides his children about the ways of the world. He tells them the prudent ways to live life:

> The sweetest thing in the world is your need yes, think on it. Your own need-the mainspring of your wants, well being and contentment. (*Sidhwa, The Crow Eaters* 10)

Sidhwa presents a home where the younger generation is acquainted with the history of the race and community, its religion and customs, with the desire that they will be carried forward by the descendants. Freddy, who had migrated from the central India to the fertile plains of Lahore to establish his business, takes pride in his customs and tells the children about these when the children and other members of the neighborhood are gathered after the business hours. He says: “to this day we don’t allow conversion to our faith or mixed marriages” (*The Crow Eaters* 13).

Putli, Freddy’s wife, works round the clock to fulfill her responsibility of making her home pleasant for everyone. Bapsi’s home too, like some of the novels of Manju Kapur, is incorporated with the concept of extended family as members; in this case Jerbanoo, Putli’s widowed mother has come to live with them. Home in the novel is a world where due respect is shown to the elderly parent on either side. The support system is quite strong but Putli is largely controlled by Freddy’s wishes who, on many occasions, takes irreversible stand. Jerbanoo, who was against the journey which Freddy had taken from his ancestral village to seek fortune in the city of Lahore revolts: “You obstinate fiend have you no idea how we are suffering? Have
you no care for your wife and child? Oh, how can they live at the mercy of your whims...You heartless demon!” (The Crow Eaters 18). Once in Lahore, Freddy wanted to start his own venture but had no money. His wife willingly gives all her gold to him to start his business. Putli was a satisfied wife who “fulfilled herself in housework and in the care of the children and husband” (The Crow Eaters 23). The only thing that she desired of her husband was his complete loyalty towards her and she was sure: “Whatever else he might do, he would never stray” (The Crow Eaters 23). This is reflective of writer’s unbiased stance on marital status that a wife too exacts the same standard of morality from her husband as is expected of her. Putli is a character who does not wish to explore the arena allotted to men but within home boundaries she does take stance against Freddy in matters related to her mother or her children. Jerbanoo herself does not take things lying down and demands respect:

> Putli, the servants and the children allowed her domination... she took charge of their lives and Freddy, too weak and bewildered to counteract her bullying, allowed the situation to slip out of his hand. (The Crow Eaters 26)

Jerbanoo widened her circle of acquaintances gradually after settling in Lahore that helped her and other women in emotional unburdening of their stressed selves. Her circle included women from all communities- be it Hindus, Muslims, Christians or Parsis. Thus the concept of sisterhood community as home has been developed by Sidhwa in her very first novel which becomes more prominent in forthcoming novels. Some of Manju Kapur’s novels also depict this feature, as for instant, in The Immigrant, where a women’s group meets every month to discuss their individual problems and seek each other’s advice to attain fulfillment in life. Jerbanoo, once in control of the household, tried to exercise her influence in Freddy’s store which Freddy did not like and which led to constant tussle between the two. The women of the circle advised Putli to support her mother and “stand up to her tyrannical husband” (The Crow Eaters 26). Putli tells her husband not to grudge her mother “a little social life of her own” (The Crow Eaters 27). But Freddy is unable to bear Jerbanoo’s loot and warns Putli: “And while I’m at it, let me warn you... this looting of my store has got to stop!” (The Crow Eaters 27). Putli remonstrates: “What if she takes a little something now and then... don’t forget we have uprooted her” (The Crow Eaters 27). This sense of being uprooted applies to all girls who have to leave their parents home to settle with husband and in-laws where they are often treated with contempt and
humiliation. The writer here, through a seemingly casual dialogue, is hinting and hitting hard at the outdated customs and traditions which are perpetrated and carried forward due to male dominance. When Jerbanoo gets ill and is in need of a doctor to treat her, Freddy is reluctant as it would require enormous fees. This provides keen insight into the treatment of women within the domain of the house.

Jerbanoo’s presence in his home becomes a constant site of conflict between the two and it becomes all the more difficult for Putli to strike a balance in the relationship. Freddy keeps teasing Jerbanoo far too often and crosses all limits of decency to even call her ‘a donkey’. This infuriates Putli beyond limits and she retaliates: “How dare you call my mother a donkey. How dare you! I would like to see anyone try and stop her from speaking in this house!” (The Crow Eaters 30). Freddy is fearfully alarmed when he discovered that Jerbanoo’s, “curses and lachrymose scenes coincided with setbacks in his business” (The Crow Eaters 31). So much so that he even doubts some evil influence on her mother in-law and calls for a mystic to solve it: “I have reasons to suspect that my mother-in-law has sold herself to the devil. She torments me with evil curses and I cannot sustain the loss of my business any longer. She has worked spell on my wife and children, even they are turning against me” (The Crow Eaters 34).

The writer here brings to the light another area of male prejudice which is related to looking at women as some kind of evil influence. When a man fails to accomplish the desired success, it is often the woman of the house who has to bear the brunt. Putli is a concerned wife and whenever she notices that things are going too far between her mother and Freddy, she takes control of the situation for the welfare of all. Sidhwa writes: “Putli prudently took the domestic reins in her hands. She put an end to Jerbanoo’s extravagant gossip sessions and firmly control her ransacking of the store” (The Crow Eaters 41). This shows that Sidhwa’s women protagonists, though meek and contended at times, are strong enough to handle matters inside homes as and when the situation demands. Putli is an excellent home-maker. In spite of the large retinue of servants at her back and call, she loves to do little things for her husband and children. She keeps her servants busy as she hated to see them idle. Putli has sharp observation of the activities going around in the house. She could notice a scuffle between son Yazdi and father and could intervene wisely, thus providing new insights into human relationships: “You did quite right to strike Yazdi but that won’t
show him the right path. It might be better if you sat down with him and talked things over” (The Crow Eaters 125). Freddy is compelled to acknowledge her wisdom not only in household matters but in dealing with inter-personal relationships at large.

Home environment in the novel is comfortable for daughters as well. They are given adequate opportunities for education and provided with basic facilities at par with sons. A healthy environment is meted out to girls and they are not burdened with the responsibility of taking care of siblings as was the case with Virmati in Difficult Daughters by Kapur. This is reflective of the Parsi society being more advanced to that of Hindu families in India in the same era as represented by the two writers in their novels. The advancement and awareness of Parsi community consisted in being a business class enjoying close association with rulers and in their strong survival instinct due to being a minority community.

Putli is never found complaining rather she masters the situation within home with accurate insight. She is represented as confirming fully to the patriarchal structure and does not, in any way, participate in larger socio-political discourses and activities. Putli is even reluctant and fearful of social gatherings where she has to join her husband unwillingly. It is her mother Jerbanoo, who challenges the patriarchy and, who, in spite of belonging to the other generation, articulates her antagonism to any kind of subordination. Sidhwa, in the form of Jerbanoo, presents before the readers a tough, fiercely strong woman, who does not surrender to any kind of conditioning or subjugation. Her visit to England and refusal to follow the decorum of the washroom adequately express her free and activist spirit. As Amit Dubey points out, “Puncturing the notions of feminine decency and decorum prescribed by patriarchy are the favorite sports of Jerbanoo“ (51).

Apart from the character and actions of Jerbanoo who breaks all stereotypes and taboos while staying in her married daughter’s home and asserting for her rights, the concept of ‘beyond’ in the novel is also reflected through the story of Rosy Watson, a forced prostitute who becomes a victim of the lust and revenge by Freddy, as it was his son Yazdi that she loved and Yazdi had promised to marry her before he was able to understand that she was turned into a prostitute. Various male characters in the novel, including Freddy, Mr. Allen, Prince Kamaruddin and Mr. Toddywalla all visit Hira-Mandi, and satisfy their lust. The Diamond Market or Hira-Mandi, as it is called, is an important site in Sidhwa’s novels that serves to expose the darker side of the
male dominance and its various discriminatory practices present in the form of social evils like prostitution that feed on woman’s body and put the blame on woman itself.

Rosy Watson is forced to enter into prostitution inside home boundaries by her stepmother and father by locking her inside the room. She tells Yazdi, her classmate: “They had confined her to the room without food or water, strapped to her bed. They had allowed all sorts of men into the room” (The Crow Eaters 126). Notwithstanding all the torture, she is determined to study and seek her own love in Yazdi who understands her plight and promises to marry her. He says: “You don’t have to be like this...I will marry you and take you away from that horrible house” (The Crow Eaters 127). The fact that she finds escape routes to come to school and voices her predicament is in itself a test of courage; otherwise girls are made to feel ashamed and guilty of such transgressions on her body. Rosy Watson’s desire to seek love independent of her parents and situation shows her intrinsic strength of character. She does not wish to succumb forever to the sinful desires of her parents.

In the next novel The Pakistani Bride, the concept of home that the writer presents is that of an uprooted and ‘reconstituted’ home, which is reflective of Sidhwa’s vision that home is where you live. It also indicates the character of the society which encompasses in itself people with human values of love and compassion which allows them to accept and nurture an orphaned girl as one of their own daughter. Zaitoon, the protagonist of the novel, lost her parents, Sikander and Zohra, in the frenzy of partition. She finds her second home with Miriam and Nikka, first in a refugee camp and later in the midst of the city of Lahore when she is adopted by Qasim as his daughter at a time when she was lost as a child in the tumult of partition and was searching for her parents. Qasim, the tribal man, was travelling to Lahore from Ludhiana by the same train as the child with her parents, when riots broke. The heart rendering cries of five year old girl caught Qasim’s attention, as she mistakenly turns to him calling him: “Abba, Abba, my Abba” (Sidhwa, The Pakistani Bride 29). He drew her near him and found a striking resemblance to his own daughter who was earlier lost in an epidemic. Qasim, overcome by tender feelings, accepts it as the magnanimity of Providence: “Munni, you are like the smooth, dark olive, the zaitoon that grows near our hills...The name suits you….I shall call you Zaitoon” (The Pakistani Bride 30). Qasim found in this child courage and forbearance that matched
that of her tribe and hence adopted her as his child. Makarand Paranjape rightly
observes:

Qasim and Zaitoon thus become the reconstituted family, the unlikely coming
together of two cultures, the Kohistani and the Punjabi, the tribal and the
urban, the hill and the plain, the fair and the brown. (96)

Qasim along with Zaitoon heads for Lahore and wishes to settle in the heart of the
city where adequate safety for Muslims could be ensured. Miriam and Nikka is a
childless couple living in the refugee camp in Lahore and they both shower their
utmost affection on the destitute child. Qasim loans Nikka two hundred rupees to
initiate a business on a small scale, to be returned after six months with double
amount. Nikka, with his hard work, soon grows into an “undisputed strong man of the
camp and the only paan-biri vendor around” (The Pakistani Bride 44). A month later
Nikka shifts to Qila Gujjar Singh on a rented accommodation and Qasim too shifts
with Zaitoon in the adjacent rooms so that the child could be looked after with much
care and comfort. Thus strangers soon become friends and family. With the growing
expansion of his needs, Qasim has to look for work outside and Miriam takes
complete charge of Zaitoon in his absence.

Qasim is deeply touched by the love and affection showered on her by Miriam and
makes sure to send her to school for five years where she learns Urdu. Zaitoon finds
herself comfortable in the company of Miriam and other neighborhood families which
she constantly visits. Zaitoon learns to perform various household chores from
Miriam: “to cook, sew, shop and keep her room tidy” (The Pakistani Bride 55). She
also learns inside the home that all girls bleed and have babies after their marriage.
This aspect related to fertility is given so much importance that when Zaitoon tells of
the red stains on her shalwar, Miriam “looked happy and almost triumphant as if
Zaitoon had accomplished a feat” (The Pakistani Bride 55). She tells Zaitoon that
“You are now a woman. Don’t play with boys and don’t allow any man to touch you.
This is why I wear a burkha”(The Pakistani Bride 55). The above lines depict a sharp
segregation between males and females in personal and public life, with male
members being “zealous guardians of family honour and virtue” (The Pakistani Bride
56). Women in the novel are depicted as being economically dependent on their males
and though some of them go through elementary education to be able to read the Holy
Quran, yet education does not become a means of earning livelihood or intellectual
pursuits. These women, as reflected in their day today activities, are carriers of traditions and customs.

Whereas women tend to accept and accommodate their reality of home according to the changing circumstances, this is not the case with men. Qasim, even after settling down in plains, is unable to reconcile himself with the loss of life in mountains. To restore his severed family relations, he decides to marry Zaitoon to his nephew in the tribal land of Kohistan, in spite of severe resistance from Miriam and others, since his loyalty to his ‘word’ is more significant to him than anything else. It is people ‘from the hills’ that he still considers being his ‘own’ and all Miriam’s pleadings and even defiance fail to affect him. Miriam is irreconcilable:

Your word! Your word! Your word! What has your word to do with the child’s life? What? Tell me!...how can she be happy in the mountains? Tribal ways are different, you don’t know how changed you are…they are savages, brutish, uncouth and ignorant! She will be miserable among them.

Don’t you see? (The Pakistani Bride 93)

Qasim, however, is only worried about restoring his own severed relations. Furrukh Khan rightly points out, “He is not alone; he is taking a ‘gift’ as an atonement for his long absence, and to show his commitment in desiring a renewal of his ties. And what is a better ‘gift’ than his own adopted daughter” (145). Miriam, in order to save Zaitoon’s life, goes to the extent of offering double the things presently being offered to Qasim and even getting her married to Nikka to provide them with an heir: “Why not marry him to my husband here? Yes, I’ll welcome her. We have no children and she’ll be my daughter. She’ll bear Nikka daughters and sons” (The Pakistani Bride 94). This defiant spirit in Miriam’s words, which leaves Nikka and Qasim stunned and speechless, represents the inherent strength and courage of women when it comes to taking stand on issues of existence and survival. Amit Kumar Dubey recognizes this strength when he asserts that: “in the character of Miriam, Sidhwa presents a spirited woman who rebels against this hideous commoditization of women” (58).

Zaitoon, a young child as she is, cherishes romantic notions and fantasies about the mountains and its people due to Qasim who had woven all kinds of adventurous images in her mind about hill people being “heroic, proud and incorruptible, ruled by a code of honor that banned all injustice and evil. These men tall and light-skinned
were gods—free to roam the mountains as their fancies led” (*The Pakistani Bride* 90). She romanticized the world of strong and protective tribal men and never thought of the problems and conflicts that she might face in tribal life. Hence Zaitoon was thrilled to leave for the mountains along with Qasim, although departing from Miriam was like ‘leaving’ her own mother.

Thus, with her marriage, Zaitoon is uprooted from her urban home in Lahore city and shifted to a tribal home in the remote area of Kohistan which is strikingly different from that of the plains. These people follow their own code of conduct. Qasim tells Zaitoon, “We are not bound hand and foot by government clerks and police. We live by our own rules-calling our own destiny! We are as free as the air we breathe!” (*The Pakistani Bride*100). It is ironical that as compared to complete freedom of tribal men, tribal women are confined to household responsibilities and have to wear black dress as opposed to the vibrant colors of Punjab plains. Women are round the clock busy in the household chores, like chafing, kneading, washing and tending to animals, yet they subsist on measly portion of rice, or maize soaked in bread. Men go out and work, meet their friends, indulge in their fancies or feuds as the occasion demands and resort to domestic violence on the slightest provocation, beating their wives and even mothers in a most merciless manner, especially when their notion of honour is challenged. As Makarand Paranjape observes, “the entire code of honour of the tribe rests on the notions of sexual superiority and possessiveness” (99). This is amply demonstrated when Zaitoon, on realizing that Qasim is not her real father, expresses her desire to marry Ashiq Hussain, who is from the plains and who also likes her. Qasim is stunned to hear Zaitoon voicing her opinion and uses his fatherly authority to silence her:

> Now understand this… I’ve given my word. On it depends my honour. It is dear to me than life, if you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare hands.

(*The Pakistani Bride* 158)

This is a distinctive example where false notions of honour dictate family relationships to an extent where all other human considerations lose their meaning and it is women who have to bear the cost.

One can see the attempts made by Miriam and Zaitoon to challenge patriarchy and go beyond the threshold. Miriam comes out of her *purdah* to argue Zaitoon’s case and
Zaitoon crosses the threshold of her husband’s home when she is meted out a savage treatment by her husband. Zaitoon challenges various threats to her personhood and runs from her husband’s home to seek a life of her own. She could see how Sakhi beats his own mother at the slightest provocation. She imagined her son would meet out the same treatment when she grows old and the very idea was repulsive. Seeing no future in the tribal home, she dares to escape when beaten brutally by her husband. Though the flight that she takes up is full of hazardous travail in the rugged mountains but she chooses her freedom from the shackles and tyranny perpetuated at her in-laws home. Her choice to defy the dehumanizing forces is well appreciated by an eminent critic Makarand Paranjape:

Zaitoon’s choice of freedom over slavery, her rejection of the oppressive and brutal tribal society, her courageous and heroic struggle for survival against impossible odds—all these are a testimony to the fighting spirit of the weak and the crushed. (104)

‘Beyond,’ in the novel, is thus discussed from the point of view of the oppression of women in Pakistani society. The whole tribe goes hunting her but her undefeatable spirit overpowers all the barriers and she ultimately reaches the bridge, beyond which she will be a free woman. Sakhi was deeply pained at not being able to trace her for nine days. His mother Hamida tries to console him asking him to leave things to ‘Allah’. Hamida too had her sympathy with the girl and she told Sakhi, “You shouldn’t have beaten her like that, son. You know she was different…you frightened her” (The Pakistani Bride 216). The fact that Hamida was able to voice herself is also an indication that Zaitoon’s strength in revolting against the dehumanizing practices of the tribe also imbibed a sense of justice in Hamida and she goes beyond her routine acceptance of the oppression. At least she speaks her mind without caring for the repercussions. Thus, the novel, while presenting the irrational and cruel aspects of patriarchy, simultaneously displays a conscious effort by the woman protagonist and other female characters to resist and even openly challenge patriarchal order and mindset in certain spheres. The observation by Kirubahar and Kalidas is worth mentioning in this respect: “Zaitoon’s struggle highlights one of the pivotal issues in feminist discourse, viz., the position of, and the treatment meted out to women” (82).

The element of ‘beyond’ is also visible in the treatment of woman characters like young American, Carol, who is Western educated and comes to Pakistan after
marrying Farukh Khan, an engineer in the army who had gone to America for his degree. Her presence in the novel does not emphasize “the cross-cultural differences between East and West so much as the cross-gender differences that exist within the Pakistani society” (Crane 51). Carol, another bride in the novel, who is not familiar with the secondary role of women at various levels of Asian society, “rebels against the restrictions, against her husband’s jealousy and suspicions, and against the sexual repression that hinders free exchange between men and women” (Ross163). It is Carol through whom Sidhwa speaks when she speaks out against the oppression of women:

Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get importunately impregnated, beaten up, bullied, disinheritd. It was an immutable law of nature. What had the tribal girl done to deserve such grotesque retribution? Had she fallen in love with the wrong man? (The Pakistani Bride 226)

It is this voice against the patriarchal and tribal oppression that constitutes the element of ‘beyond’ in the novel. Sidhwa’s representation of ‘home’ in the next novel, Cracking India, is quite different from the home of earlier novels. While it was a secure home in The Crow Eaters, the protagonist of The Pakistani Bride Zaitoon lives in a make shift home on the mercy of her foster father and their neighbors Miriam and Nikka in Lahore. Concept of ‘home’ in Cracking India, gets broadened so as to encompass a home within home where tenants, servants and other outsiders live with homely warmth and harmony and a ‘home’ outside home in the form of neighborhood, where the whole village and various communities serve as safe comfortable spaces providing love, care and shelter to various members in times of need till the tragedy of partition strikes them and tears them apart. Whereas the traditional home is represented by Sethis- Lenny’s parents, a home within home is represented by the Shankar and Geeta, who live as tenants with Lenny’s parents, home of Muccho- the sweeper, who lives in the servants quarter and neighborhood as ‘home’ represented by characters of Godmother, Electric aunt, Slave-sister and Mini Aunty. These are the homes which, Lenny, the protagonist of the novel, very frequently visits and finds comfort there which contributes to her mental growth and wiser understanding of the society around her. Sidhwa also presents village as a
bigger home where people live like family members and help each other through thick and thin until the horrors of partition forced on them by the political rulers.

Lenny’s parents own their house on Warris Road in Lahore where Lenny, a polio stricken eight year old girl and the protagonist of the novel, lives with her beautiful and beloved attendant Ayah, named Shantha, who looks after her with love, care and compassion. Lenny’s home bustles with people and activities, with Iman din, the cook, Hari- the gardener, Ayah, Moti- the sweeper, and a boy, Yousaf, to run errands. Lenny’s mother, being a social worker, is frequently visited by other women especially on Saturdays when neighboring women come to her house to discuss the situation in the neighborhood and country at large in the backdrop of the turmoil of the times. Lenny, unperturbed by her polio in childhood, and rather finding it ‘lucky’ and advantageous in certain ways, finds great comfort in Godmother’s company who loves her like her own child and her emotional bonding with her is stronger than “the bond of motherhood” (Sidhwa, Cracking India 13).

The concept of home is redefined through Lenny’s relationship with Godmother and the solace that she gets there in her presence. Lenny’s adoration for Godmother is expressed in the following lines, “The intensity of her tenderness and the concentration of her attention are narcotic. I require no one else” (Cracking India 17). The relationship between Lenny’s parents is an indication that women in Parsi households are relatively given more respect and space, though within the larger constraints of patriarchy itself. The relationship between children is cordial and is indicative of the impartial stand beginning to be adopted by the parents towards their children. The narrator’s relationship with her cousin upholds the principle of equality (or even superiority of woman), as she does not allow him to maneuver her sexually and retains balance and control over her body and desires. It is remarkable to see that Lenny’s lameness, does not, in any way, become a source of constricting force on her psyche and she remains bold and assertive when it comes to taking the most crucial decisions of her life.

Sidhwa presents a home where mistress of the house is concerned about the welfare of its attendants and they look up to her as godly figure. Lenny’s mother has full faith in Ayah and other attendants and can leave Lenny with them without any anxiety. Lenny even goes to a far off village called Pir Pando with Imam din, which shows that these domestic helps in the family had secured the trust of the family in which
they served, which is reflective of the values of honesty, trust, integrity and brotherhood present in the society of the times.

The concept of village as home has also been presented by Sidhwa in the form of realistic portrayal of the lives of people in pre-partition days. When Imam Din visits his home in village with Lenny, he talks to the villagers about the ‘sly killings’ in the city and the impending danger of partition due to growing communal disharmony in the form of ‘Hindu-Muslim trouble’ and ‘Sikh-Muslim trouble also.’ The head of the village is aware of this brewing distrust but has full faith in the oneness of humanity, a feeling that has been exhibited by the villagers all along: “To us villagers what does it matter if a peasant is a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Sikh?” (Cracking India 65) The villagers are ready to protect each other’s lives at every cost, whatever is the caste or community. As observed by Jagdev Singh:

> The roots of communal amity in rural Punjab go so deep that the members of the two communities are ready to sacrifice even their lives for protecting each other. (169)

The writer, through the detached narrative of Lenny, presents a most authentic account of how the bonds and ties of larger home and family established through ages, begin to crack under the impact of larger political and historical crisis.

Sidhwa’s broader concept of home, with nation as home, is deftly revealed in the conversations over a dinner party arranged by Lenny’s parents where Inspector General Rogers and Mr. Singh get involved in heated exchange over the impact of British rule and policies on India and Mr. Singh emphatically declares that: “We will have Swaraj!” (Cracking India 70) When Inspector Rogers again raises his doubts about internal fights that will ensue if they quit India, Mr. Singh again says assertively, “We all want the same thing! We want Independence!” (Cracking India 71)

Sidhwa’s concept of home in the novel extends to a place where women hold get-together and sit and dine with the males, discuss and participate in the political events of the country. When the riots break up, Lenny’s mother with her team of active women plays a decisive role in rescuing the victims of rape and arson. They are not just restricted to home and hearth but take command of the whole situation in their hands and function as agents of social and political change. The element of female
bonding leads to the reversal of conventional power equations in the sense that at the
tumultuous time of partition, it is women who become all powerful agents of change
and they use their power in a most human and compassionate manner by helping and
empathizing with the weakest and the poorest. Their power neither corrupts them nor
makes them arrogant. Godmother who is in a position to do anything and commands
tremendous love and respect, seldom ‘ventures out’. She only visits if someone is
very sick or in extreme need of her. In spite of her very limited movements, she is
aware of literally everything that goes around her and this is the source of her
‘immense power.’ Lenny has more faith in her than anything else and proudly recalls,
“And when ….I at last look into her shrewd ancient eyes, I can tell…Everything’s
going to be all right!” (Cracking India 252) and the writer points out that such
undying faith in human bonding is the source of basic goodness and all human values.
‘Beyond’ in the novel is thus presented not only in the form of ‘coming of age’ of
various female characters but also in the form of the birth of a new nation of Pakistan.
As Paranjape puts it that the role played by Lenny, Ayah and other female characters
in the prevailing politics of the day culminates in the “birth of a new nation of
Pakistan…it is the growing up and release from British interference—from the
European who has only brought polio and syphilis and such to this older more
cultured civilization” (Paranjape 83). Sidhwa interrogates the idea of separation of the
subcontinent through Lenny’s innocent thoughts: “There is much disturbing talk.
India is to going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what happens if they
break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever
get to Godmother’s then?” (Cracking India101) Lenny’s mother and her group of
other women participate in the various meetings held by leaders of different
communities, so as to have a firsthand knowledge of the situations that develop in the
wake of imminent cracking of the nation. They step out of the boundaries of threshold
and play a vital role in rescuing the raped and mutilated women. Amit Kumar Dubey
rightly observes:

In Ice-Candy-Man where most of the male characters either remain apathetic
or indulge in destructive violence, women are shown to be at the peak of
morality. It is the women who control all action and turn all the circumstances
in their favor. (18)
The novel stands apart from *The Pakistani Bride* in its portrayal of the theme of partition and women stepping out of the boundaries of the patriarchal threshold to exhibit the concept of sisterhood and active socio-political participation. Godmother’s personality, “sparkles with the razor sharp wit...she has the capability to mould, modify and order not only individuals but even the system according to herself” (Dubey19). She is gifted with deep understanding of human existence and her wisdom is revealed when she consoles Ayah with these words: “That was fated, daughter. It can’t be undone. But it can be forgiven...Worse things are forgiven...That’s the way of life” (*Cracking India* 273-274). Yet she does not force things on Ayah and when she is pretty sure that Ayah is determined to move out of the alliance with Ice-candy-man, she is rescued from his clutches and sent to Amritsar. This whole episode clearly establishes the capability of women to take part in the larger political and social concerns. These are strong and determined woman who are not ready to just sit at home and cater to the need of the family. They are able to strike a balance by appointing extra help for household chores, as does Lenny’s mother, her aunt and Godmother and devote themselves for the larger cause. Jacquelyn M. Kleist observation in this regard is pertinent that Lenny’s mother, in rescuing the various ‘fallen women’ “has clearly moved beyond the traditional role of housewife to become a social activist” (74). These women are apt at negotiating their time and energy for various causes which need attention and their active participation since they believe that the scenario for the women will not change unless they become the change themselves.

Bapsi Sidhwa, while depicting the strength of women’s agency and female bonding in her novel, has provided the readers too with immense strength and determination to fight all odds and survive with dignity. What is also significant is that power and strength of this bonding is not limited to domestic or nationalistic terrains; it goes beyond all boundaries to encompass all humanity. Godmother has her connections with people from all strata of the society and makes her business to know ‘everything about everybody.’ As Kleist puts it that her “feminine power lies not only in knowledge, but also in action” (76). Contrary to traditional patriarchal power dynamics, it is the Godmother here who dominates over Ice candy man and through her wide ‘network of espionage’ and her huge ‘reservoir of random knowledge’ single handedly engenders ‘the social and moral climate of retribution and justice’ required
to liberate and rehabilitate Ayah. It is Ayah’s desire and decision that is respected and not that of Ice candy man who is verbally lashed and shown his proper place for acting as a pimp: “You’re not a man; you’re a low born, two-bit evil little mouse!” (Cracking India 260) Lenny is awestruck to see Godmother’s power over Ice candy man and comments: “it is frightening to watch the silent tumult of Ice- candy- man’s capitulation” (Cracking India 261). Bapsi Sidhwa reposes complete faith in her female characters and their collective dreams and associations.

While situating her women characters in different roles and locations, she assigns them with varied degree of resistance and autonomy, ultimately converging into common sea of collective strength where each one of them can understand and voice the concerns of the other, thereby strengthening female agency and empowerment. In this sense, the novel offers a counter history and discourse to the dominant patriarchal and national discourse related to partition where women are invariably shown as victims only. It is refreshing to see female characters being presented in all their complexities and with the focus and gaze shifting from women’s bodies to women’s agency, autonomy and capability to rise above the domestic constraints so as to decisively and positively alter the course of history and the nation. The novels The Craw Eaters, Cracking India and An American Brat have been considered as female bildungsroman by Makarand R.Paranjape since they represent, “the awakening of the female heroine into political consciousness, into the awareness of their bodies and how they relate to the culture” (83).

The concept of home assumes an altered connotation in Sidhwa’s work, The American Brat. ‘Home’ here is not just a place where family members discuss issues within the constraints of nuclear families but extends to extended families residing in other cities and across national boundaries who gather together on various occasions like wedding, farewell party and in times of misfortune. While extending the notion of home to a village and nation in Cracking India, the writer’s terrain gets even more broadened in this novel to include the concept of ‘home abroad’ where her protagonist breaks the chains of customs, region and nation to fit into one of the most advanced countries of the world, America. This is a reflection of her woman protagonist’s long cherished desire to find a ‘home’ away from native home where she can feel emotionally and economically comfortable and do away with outdated customs and rituals that hinder her personal growth.
This is a home of the Parsi household, where the mother is not only educated but also gifted with a sharp acumen to groom her daughters in a meaningful way. The protagonist Feroza’s mother, Zareen, is a woman who would like to see her daughter move with the times and not be affected by the general repressive atmosphere during Zia’s fundamentalist regime. She pushes her daughter beyond the boundaries of home to protect her from the impact of conservatism and sectarian politics. Home, as represented in the novel, is meant to be a place where the best of tradition is followed along with the advanced notions of individual and social growth which prepare one to face the world and feel the essence of life.

Zareen, on account of the various domestic helps employed to assist her is free from the mundane chores related to the management of the house and is able to participate in various social activities. She is on the various committees for the disadvantaged sections of the society during Bhutto’s regime. She takes part in the heated discussions which follow during dinner parties and consequently, is deeply aware of the political scenario of the country. In Parsi homes, though boys are sent abroad for studies but girls are permitted abroad only for a holiday if the family can afford it. Hence Feroza, the main protagonist of the novel and daughter to Zareen, was quite excited to go to America, the land of her dreams. A farewell dinner was organized by the Ginwallas at their bungalow and all the members of the extended family and Parsi friends, Muslim friends, came to shower their blessings on Feroza, who was ready to take the arduous journey all alone. Khutlibai, Soonamai, and aunts smeared her forehead with vermilion and rice and presented envelopes, “anointed with the auspicious paste and thick with cash” (Sidhwa, An American Brat 46). Tears welled up in Feroza’s eyes as she was going far from Lahore, but, at the same time “there were many splendid cities beneath the same caressing sun that she wanted to look at, many new faces in the teeming world she wished to know and love as much as she loved her classmates and her family” (An American Brat 47). The writer is keen to depict her woman protagonists looking beyond the boundaries of not only homes but nations, and explore the regions hitherto untraversed.

Feroza, though, like Nina in The Immigrant, is disappointed on the very first moment of her confrontation with the immigrant authorities. She is so dismayed at the way the people from her region are humiliatingly scrutinized at the airport that she, for once, decides to return to Pakistan but Sidhwa’s protagonists are not to be bogged down by
challenges and are ready to learn and adjust to new surroundings. Sidhwa’s perspective of ‘home abroad’ is also reflected in the way people of the same nation come together to build their home away from home. As soon as the news of Feroza coming to America reaches Manek, he shifted from the dorms of M.I.T. to a decent rented apartment in Somerville. There was another Pakistani student, Jamil, living next door and both of them fetched Feroza’s luggage. After reaching the apartments, Feroza handed over to Manek all the gifts that the family had sent across the seas. Manek was overwhelmed with emotions as he was receiving these things after three years of his stay in America. He plans to take Feroza to different museums around the place and also acquaints her with the modes of behavior expected in this foreign land. He narrates the harrowing experiences he had initially undergone so that she could learn and benefit from them. Feroza was introduced to Father Fibbs, who had left a promising career to guide the students to be wary of materialistic pursuits, at a dinner hosted by Manek. Feroza could notice the sense of satisfaction among the three friends gathered at the dinner: “They were all of them, so far from home, Feroza reflected, and yet she was happy” (An American Brat 108). This reflection by Feroza proves Sidhwa’s stance that one can find home where ever one is placed.

Home is not a limited notion in Sidhwa’s comprehension. It is where one finds the comfort zone and security of friendship and in one’s capability to assimilate in the alien culture. Manek, who had never prepared tea in his home in Pakistan “astonished Feroza by his culinary prowess necessity had brought forth”(An American Brat 114). Three years away from family and surviving in different culture, Manek had matured enough and exhibited great sense of responsibility towards Feroza. This also indicates Sidhwa’s emphasis on eradication of gender differences in sharing of household responsibilities. Feroza, having assured her family back home in Pakistan through a letter about her safety and future plans, is permitted to go for higher studies and pursue a Hotel Management course in America. She finds herself a college in Twin falls, Idaho, and shares her apartment with Jo, another girl from Atlanta, who had joined the same course. Feroza learns to cook, earn money from on campus jobs and socializes with boys in the company of Jo. She also learned their ‘exotic culture’ and consciously assimilated herself in the freedom it provided. She learnt, “how much an abstract word like ‘freedom’ could encompass…the rights the individuals had and, most important, that those rights were active, not, as in Pakistan, given by the
constitution but otherwise comatose” (*An American Brat* 171). After Jo leaves her course halfway, Feroza shifts to University of Denver and finds her home abroad with two young black girls, Rhonda and Gwen, from a poor family who valued education for its potential to bring change in one’s life. Gwen, in her discussions with Feroza, tells her that she wanted to achieve something as she hated the life cycle of poverty and domestic chores in which she was placed.

This approach to life indicates that Sidhwa’s women are treading forward with great responsibility and simultaneously with the choice of their own. Gwen regretted that she could not work hard for the scholarship as “she has been too busy with responsibilities to give enough time to her studies. It had been something of an achievement that she had graduated from high school at all and had not dropped out like many of her peers” (*An American Brat* 227). Gwen can be compared to Virmati of *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur, who had to take care of her siblings like a second mother that posed great difficulties in pursuing her education. Feroza’s act of finding a home with the unknown girls from altogether different culture seems to support Sidhwa’s idea of sisterhood and her appeal to women all over the world to forge a bond that may prove to be the strongest in women’s journey towards assertion of the self. Sidhwa also points out through the story of Jo, Rhonda and Gwen that women across the globe are struggling to search their independent identity. The writer’s desire to see women asserting themselves in various aspects of social life and learning from each other’s experiences is clearly exhibited in the “multiple representations of her female characters in general and Feroza in particular” in the backdrop of Diaspora (Iimitiaz and Asif Ali 103).

However, all Feroza’s high education and foreign experience falls short in the eyes of her family in Pakistan whose topmost priority still relates to her settlement after marriage. Her mother, Zareen, is very eager to see that she marry and settle down in life as soon as possible but Feroza protests that she is “not settling anywhere without a career,” and that she would never prefer to be “at the mercy” of her husband (*An American Brat* 240). Feroza is finally able to convince her family for the continuation of her studies and returns to America to be part of its culture for ever as her visit home made her realize that, “at some hidden level of her consciousness” she found “her sense of dislocation deepen” (*An American Brat* 239).
The constraints within the family, community and society of Pakistan have been clearly brought out by the novelist, as also the conflicts and contradictions faced by women in general and Feroza in particular, as she dares to go beyond the social, cultural and religious boundaries to settle down on her own terms in a foreign country. Sidhwa’s women are politically sound and quite aware of the social problems and evils that need Redressal. Like Lenny’s mother and Godmother, Feroza’s mother, Zareen, too has subverted the roles demanded of them by establishing herself as an active social worker, helping the disadvantaged people and being a part of many women’s committees with Begum Bhutto. Sidhwa makes Feroza her mouth piece when she talks of the Hadood ordinances and establishing of Federal Shariat court and endorses a massive protest by the public in Safia Bibi’s case, a blind sixteen year girl raped and charged with adultery. It is a significant pointer to the status of women in twenty first century in Pakistani society. Trapping of Safia Bibi’s father by the Zina Ordinance, which requires the “testimony of the four ‘honorable’ male eye-witness or eight female eye-witnesses to establish rape,” (An American Brat 236) reflects the pinnacle of hypocrisy practiced towards women in Pakistani society dominated by male-chauvinism. Sidhwa voices her discontent when she writes: “The startled women, who had enjoyed equal status under the previous law, realized that their worth had been discounted by fifty percent” (An American Brat 237). The fact that Safia Bibi escaped punishment was a victory of the various groups who raised their voices against such blatant injustice. Women exhibited sheer courage along with the human rights group and, “came out of the streets, burning their veils, voicing their protests, and beating their breasts, and Zareen was among them” (An American Brat 237). Feroza on returning to her home-country Pakistan was disgusted to know about the criminal procedure and even felt annoyed why she had been kept in dark about all these happenings, “You should have sent me newspaper clippings. I want to know what’s going on here. After all, it’s my country!” (An American Brat 237) Thus ‘home’ acquires broader connotations in the context of the Diaspora and universal experiences and solidarity.

Sidhwa also talks of obsessive Islamic fundamentalism by General Zia which encouraged religious chauvinism and vulnerability of marginalized people to irrational hostility. The protagonist is well aware of the marked difference in the economic conditions of her home country and that of America. Her discussions on
poverty, apartheid and Hispanics had little effect on her people as, “they had their own vistas of uncompromising poverty and could not feel compassion for people in a distant and opulent country…that utilized one-fourth of the world’s resources and polluted its atmosphere and water with nuclear tests”( An American Brat 238). This observation by Feroza shows that Sidhwa’s protagonist understands the political and social scenario of her own country as well as that of America. This comprehensive and universal understanding clearly establishes that Feroza has moved beyond the boundaries of home and nation to participate in making a world a better place to live in. B.R.Aggarwal observes in this regard:

Sidhwa presents the fundamentalism of Parsi community as unfair to women as unjust as the Islamic fundamentalism is to the women, though she does assert that Parsi women enjoy more freedom than their Islamic counterparts. Both Feroza and Zareen travel at the physical level as also at the intellectual level and enjoy their liberated cosmos in America. They find themselves treated as individuals in their own right and not merely as show pieces as wife, daughter or sister of someone. (174)

Sidhw’a last novel, Water, depicts the homes on the Bengal-Bihar border rooted in orthodox set up and beliefs, particularly in relation to woman’s education and early marriage. The protagonist of the novel, a six year old Chuyia, lives with her parents in a village. Her father, Somnath is a village priest who performs rituals at weddings, death and christening ceremonies, while her mother, Bhagya, tends to her duties inside the house. The orthodox in Somnath comes to the fore when he consents to give Chuyia in marriage to a widower, Hira Lal, aged forty-four years and already a grandfather, without consulting anyone in the house, not even her mother. Hira Lal’s family is a rich and respected Brahmin family and Somnath feels that the alliance will be beneficial for his sons. Feeling rather honored by the alliance, Somnath tells his wife Bhagya that Chuyia will be sent only when she comes of age. Bhagya is so distressed and angered at this decision that she wishes, “Ishh, Bhagwan: may she never come of age!”( Sidhwa, Water14)

Somnath uses his authoritative mode and tells his wife that: “A women’s body is a site of conflict between a demonic stri-savavahava, which is her lustful aspect, and her stri-dharma, which is her womanly duty” (Water14). Bhagya registers her protest saying: “And you think that man will be able to satisfy her stri-svavahava? By the
time her womanhood blooms, he’ll be old and spent” (Water 14). Somnath becomes angry at this brazen mention of the sexual aspect in relation to his daughter and Bhagya, being a victim of the society which follows the puritanical traditions, ultimately succumbs to his patriarchal authority. The unholy marital alliance which Hira Lal finds for his daughter is even beyond the parameters of marriage sanctioned by traditions and hence questionable. Yet Somnath, a representative of male-chauvinism, tells Bhagya not to interfere and “frozen with the weight of hoary tradition that brooked no deviation, his look chilled her blood,” and she humbly surrenders: “it will be as you say- you are the father” (Water 15). Bhagya’s unease and discomfort, though unable to prevail upon the decision, yet, is an indication of the seeds of protests present in a woman of Bhagya’s generation. The important thing to note here is her desire to break these barriers which hinder the growth and development of women in any society.

The home presented in the novel is the representative home of the society of the pre-partition times when there was open preference for the male child. Sons held additional value and Bhagya too reserved extra portions of food for her sons. She wonders at her partial attitude towards her sons, lavishing all her attention to them knowing it well that Chuyia is an exact replica of her own childhood. Bhagya’s conscience is torn between her affection for the sons and ignorance for her daughter and she questions herself: “why did she not lavish on her the affection and attention she lavished on her sons?”(Water16). Bhagya reads scriptures in free time and Chuyia listens intently the stories narrated in Mahabharata. Hence the general expectations of the society in relation to a woman’s character and behavior get filtered into the consciousness of the child. However, Chuyia is not burdened with any responsibility in household work as is Virmati in Difficult Daughters. At an auspicious date, Chuyia is married to Hira Lal in a simple ceremony in a temple, though she was too young to even understand the meaning of marriage. Chuyia lives in her parental home as was the custom with the married pre-pubescent girls. Not long after, the news of her husband’s near death reaches her parents and they feel heavily burdened by their daughter’s fate. They are aware that in Brahmin culture, once widowed, a woman was deprived of her useful functions in the society. Hira Lal dies and Chuyia is ultimately sent to the widow-ashram, where she painfully finds her home with other widows. The brutal metamorphosis of Chuyia’s body being shorn as trademark of her social death and the strict disconnection from old ties marks the start of the dejected life that
awaits her in the impoverished Widow’s house: “with her white sari and bald, yellow head, Chuyia is very different child from the girl who had ridden in the bullock cart” (Water 44). A mere child of eight years is forced to live as a widow for the rest of her life for no fault of her own. The fate she is meted out is merely because her father, under the burden of traditions, tells her that widow-house is her home from now onwards. Kunti, one of the widows, forcibly carried Chuyia inside the widow-ashram even as the poor child kept screaming: “Baba, don’t leave me here! Baba don’t leave me!” (Water50).

Sidhwa presents the concept of community as home and here widow ashram has been presented as a ‘home’ away from home. It is an environment of forced captivity where married women, on the death of their spouses, are left to suffer as anonymous entities of the society, with no choice but to leave their marital and parental homes at whatever age it may happen. This widow-ashram houses as many as twenty widows of various ages, who, with tonsured heads and white saris, are joined together by their shared grief. Chuyia feels extremely isolated when she first lands here but goaded by her need for companionship, she soon develops ‘new surrogate kinship patterns.’ As one of the critics points out: “the widows need to conglomerate, seek companionship and build collective strength to their forced isolation makes this place all the more meaningful” (Dubey107). These widows come from different class and strata of society, from land-owning families to the lower rung but their fate unites them all. However, hierarchy is seen to be working in the ashram too, with fifty years old Madhumati ruling the ashram, as she comes from a rich family who has paid for her upkeep. Kalyani is taken across waters to satisfy the ‘clients’ and the money thus earned is used to sustain the ashram. It is when Chuyia comes to the ashram that the rigid strictures begin to be challenged.

Sidhwa’s use of child-widow as protagonist is more than a juxtaposition of innocence versus ingenuity. Chuyia is made to question the system to know why there are no male widowers and why only women are subjected to this regime. Her arrival brings about sudden changes in the ashram. She rejects Madhumati’s assertions that this is the lot of women whose husbands die and clearly puts her stand: “I don’t want to be a stupid widow! Fatty!” (Water53). Madhumati catches hold of her to thrash her but as an act of rebellion, Chuyia dug her teeth in her thigh and Madhumati writhes in pain. The act reveals open hatred in favor of social evils that reduce woman’s life to anonymity and endless suffering. However, Chuyia felt safe in the company of
Shakuntala whose maternal instincts are aroused on seeing her and she tells her to sit with elderly widow Pitaraji. Looking at them, Shakuntala felt, “how appropriate they looked together—similar in their innocence and in their vulnerability, they completed a circle. The very young and the very old belonged together” (Water 56). Pitaraji, Shakuntala and Kalyani try to make ashram comfortable for Chuyia- the little widow, who is still hopeful of returning to her home in the village someday. This hope is representative of the visionary streak of the author with regard to emancipation of widows’ lives.

One day Chuyia slipped out of the ashram courtyard and found herself in a temple where widows were singing and dancing to earn their meager meal. It dawned upon Chuyia that there were thousands of widows in the town who were living in different ashrams. She was horrified to see the joyless performance and went back to the “relative sanctuary of the ashram” (Water 60). Kalyani treats Chuyia as her little sister and inviting her to her room, allows her to play with ‘Kalu’, her pet dog. This reminds Chuyia of her own pet dog ‘Tun Tun’ in the village and for the first time since she left home, Chuyia found something that brought her happiness. During monsoon, when all widows were forced indoors, Chuyia befriends Kunti and both enjoy playing many games together, joined by other young widows while the older ones watched. During Holi celebrations, Chuyia is decorated as Lord Krishna and all other widows sing and dance round her. Thus Chuyia creates her own ‘home’ and happiness with these women. Shakuntala, with her little knowledge of the alphabets, read scriptures and narrated stories of king Dushyant and Shakuntala to Chuyia who heard them with spellbound interest. She goes to the river with Kalyani and enjoys splashing water and bathing ‘Kalu’. A young Gandhi follower, enamored by Kalyani’s beauty, intends to marry her in spite of the fact that she is a widow and Chuyia becomes their secret emissary. She moves beyond the threshold of the ashram and helps in the union of two lovers. Kalyani and Chuyia shared each other’s grief and happiness, thus finding a way to deal with their agonizing situation by establishing the bond of sisterhood and solidarity.

Sidhwa’s women express their anger and protest against the age old traditions living in the ‘House of Widows’. Madhumati talking to Gulabi, the eunuch, narrates how she was dotted upon by her father who had given huge dowry for her daughter to live in comfort, but the death of her husband landed her in the widow-ashram. Cursing her husband, Madhumati, expresses her anger at the age old customs which treat women
as an object. She had boldly asked her in-laws for the part of her dowry after her husband’s death which instigated her brother in-laws to rape her for a week and then throw her in a ditch where Gulabi, the eunuch found her. She was barely fourteen years old when married and has been rotting in this hell for forty years now as a victim of traditions. She was sent to a ‘client’ by the head widow at that time, but she gained the control of the *ashram* by the age of twenty years and also forced her in-laws to “relinquish a part of her inheritance as a donation to the *ashram* temple” (*Water* 86). Kalyani, who had become a virgin widow at the age of nine years, also moves beyond the age old traditions and tries to break the fetters which bind women by falling in love with Narayan, a high-caste and affluent young man. She decides to marry him when supported by Chuyia and Shakuntala.

That Sidhwa’s women were moving beyond their present pathetic conditions is also evident in the discussions that take place between Gulabi and Madhumati about Gandhi and his social reforms. They both keep track of Gandhi’s activities and were aware that Gandhi favored widow-remarriage and equality of all human beings. It is Shakuntala who dares to challenge the patriarchy practiced by Madhumati in the *ashram*. She has her own strong position in the *ashram*, as her brothers had donated a substantial sum to the *ashram* for her maintenance. When Madhumati resists Kalyani’s effort to marry Narayan, Shakuntala reads scriptures to gain more insight into the traditions and questions Sadanand, the priest, “Panditji, is it written that widows should be treated badly?” (*Water*184). When the priest hesitantly tells that such laws do exist which allows widow remarriage, Shakuntala is enraged and even rebukes him for hiding these facts from widows. She counters the priest: “A law?..Why don’t we know about it? Shouldn’t we have been told?” (*Water*185). Now she understands the deceit perpetuated by Madhumati who had, “deliberately withheld the information from Kalyani; she had no compunctions about destroying the young woman’s only chance for happiness for selfish reasons” (*Water*185).

Shakuntala openly challenges Madhumati for the keys to the *brasati* where Kalyani was locked and liberates her to go to Narayan to marry and live her life. She also assures to send a word to Narayan but unfortunately Kalyani gets so disturbed to discover the truth that Narayan’s own father had been her client that she goes to the *ghats* and drowns herself. Madhumati decides to force Chuyia into prostitution to secure income for the *ashram*. Chuyia was taken across the waters by Gulabi on the pretext of taking her to her parental home but is saved by Shakuntala with the help of
another woman who is also a follower of Gandhi. Shakuntala goes to the station to hear Gandhi ji’s speech against outdated traditions and his appeal to people to think differently and work for changing the plight of the women in general. It is then that it dawns upon Shakuntala that Chuyia can be safe with Gandhi followers and as the train begins to leave the station with Gandhi followers on board, she hands over Chuyia to someone who turns out to be Narayan. Narayan’s stretched out hand symbolized the victory of the radical forces that denounce age old retrogressive traditions and fight for the interests of the disadvantaged sections.

It is clear from the above discussion that Sidhwa’s women have the necessary acumen to defy and move beyond the rigid norms, though it is a long way to go. Stefano Mercanti observes:

> Although oppressive dominator values are firmly institutionalized through blind religious indoctrination, gender inequality and enforced sexual exploitation, they are shown to be questioned and unsettled by the partnership values of love, mutual care and respect, which link rather than rank human beings in their common pursuit of freedom. (174)

Both female and male characters are shown to be affected by rigidity of social and cultural beliefs, yet they are able to gain agency only when they are willing to subvert the restrictive values of their orthodoxy. The novelist identifies three major power structures responsible for the victimization of the widows. The unchallenged ruling class ideology allows priestly class to use selected holy texts to subjugate women and widows while the patriarchal hegemony of rich landlords combined with a section of influential women who have internalized patriarchal beliefs for perpetuating their own vested interests, exploit orthodoxy in favor of their own physical and material needs. Sidhwa counters the above power structures through three women characters, namely Chuyia, Kalyani and Shakuntala, who try to break the corrupt cycle of conservative beliefs and practices in order to create a dignified situation for the widows. Amit Kumar Dubey rightly observes:

> The narrative becomes expressive of the graph of attitudes from passivity, modesty, subjugation, fear, acceptance and resignation to the empowered traits of curiosity, interrogation, imaging, defiance and determination. (118)

Sidhwa, in one of her interviews with David Montenegro, speaks of the suffocating patriarchy in Water: “Besides being a gripping story, the plot also deals with the
oppressive hold that traditions have on women and tells of oppression and constraints that govern even a girl’s child life in a patriarchal society” (Web).

Thus the issues pertinent to home and stepping beyond are discussed at length by both the novelists with a view to bring awareness to the readers of the Indian sub-continent. The intricacies, the power struggles, the process of going beyond the threshold, love-relationships, entrepreneurial skills, the concept of sisterhood, all have received new treatment at the hands of these writers. The concept of home, as discussed by both these writers, gets broadened to include a temporary, uprooted or reconstituted ‘home’ outside home in the form of neighborhood houses, supportive villages and city areas, tribal hills, widow ashrams, hostels, social groups, nongovernmental organizations and foreign countries where the immigrant woman characters go and settle down.
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