Chapter-7
Conclusion
To conclude it can be safely said that the Indian women novelists are highly conscious of the women’s liberation movement. They have added a new dimension to Indian-English fiction with their exquisite perception of men and manners. Their fiction constitutes a major segment of the contemporary writing in English. It provides insight, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women writers’ eyes we can see a different world, with their assistance we can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. They have dealt with the place and position of women in Indian society and their problems and plights from time to time. While doing so, they have analyzed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given Indian women their role and image along with their efforts to achieve a harmonious relationship with their surroundings.

As time and again we see the Indian women as displaced, alienated figures, grounded in the mill of convention, domestic injustice and institutionalized tyranny, the victims of the time, of the society, of their own romantic illusions, these women novelists manifest a feminist under current. Analyzing their fictional female characters, it is discernible that a large number of them rebel against social set up. They discard the idea of being submissive, suffering and sacrificing. Rebellion is not an easy process it demands determination and a will to stand by the cause of rebellion at any cost. They have often come up to paying the price of their rebellion rather than submitting and dying through suffocation. The women novelists have written with immense concern and understanding for their female characters. The hidden and suppressed world of Indian women comes to full light in their novels. It will not be wrong to call these novelists the most powerful forerunners of Women’s liberation movement in India. The main thrust of these writers is to create a realization among general people that India cannot afford to stagnate and waste half of its population by means of neglecting them merely on the basis of sex discrimination and age-old prejudices. The individuality can no longer be
kept in check. In this connection Manju Kapur is no exception. She displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Striking a balance between a natural co-existence and unfettered freedom and space on the other, Kapur’s eloquent narration of women’s issues is nevertheless, both Indian and universal. Kapur says,

I do write about women. I find women’s lives fascinating, the way they have to negotiate public and private space. They have to do many things, they have to play so many roles, there’s a lot of stuff to say about women. And it is also what I know. (1)

Kapur’s sensitivity is reflected even in the issue that whether or not a girl has the right to make her own choices in life, an issue dragged this way and that for a long time in our country. Facing equal assault from the chauvinists who declare that woman’s place is inside the house, and feminists who condemn the idea of taking the husband’s surname after marriage, the idea finds a middle path here. There is after all a difference between possessing and protecting. Her novels deal with the idea of education for a girl for her sake, not just to enable her to land a suitable match. Manju Kapur comments on her area of writing:

I am exploring the space that women occupy in domestic relationship. It is a world I know and understand. The mother-daughter nexus is only one of the many manifestations of Indian woman’s role. She is a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law in fact; there are so many aspects of a woman’s life she still need to write about that. I was nothing, husbandless, childless, I felt myself hovering like pencil notation on the margins of society. (2)

She has dealt with the mind and soul of the protagonist, her inner workings and hidden and silent thoughts rather than her appearance.

The suppressed and subjugated world of Indian women comes to full light in her protagonists. She dexterously delineates all kinds of visible
and invisible pressure that kept Indian women suffocated for long. In her novels she presents women who try to establish their own identity. Kapur’s women were made to believe that anything outside the small world created for them was not normal. Thus a woman should basically strive for a fine interdependent partnership. But if she feels suffocated, the voice ought to be raised and there should be a total breaking away. But merely transcending societal norms is not enough. A woman should be aware, self controlled, strong willed, self reliant, rational and possessing faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense. She presents feminism at its most sane, keeping in mind the Indian content. Her fiction stresses on the woman’s need for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, and a fight against her own destiny, independence, individuality and self actualization.

She made her debut in 1998 through *Difficult Daughters*. The novel focuses Virmati, split between family duty, desire for education and illicit love. The budding of ‘New Woman’ is quite discernible in the character of Virmati who does not want to be a, “rubber doll for others to move as they willed” (3) and asserts her ways in the quest for her identity and even rebels against tradition. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce a woman towards domesticity, she projects her individuality and aspires for self reliance through education. She takes the first steps towards the journey of women liberation from the clutches of the egoist male society and is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. Kapur herself urges that,

Conflict between mother and daughter is inevitable and I suppose I was a difficult daughter. The conflict carries on through generation because mothers want their daughters to be safe. We want them to make the right choices- right in the sense that they are socially acceptable. My mother wanted me to be happily married; I want my daughters to have good jobs. (4)
The seeds of aspiration and emancipation lie in Virmati’s heart even much before she meets the professor, her lover. Her cousin Shakuntala, who is ultra modern in her approach, ingrains these seeds in her. With the result Virmati wishes to be like her. This vaulting ambition can be best suggested by her when she says:

It was useless looking for answers inside the Home. One had to look outside. To education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore Colleges. (5)

Her desire for education leads her to cherish independence. She refuses outright to marry with her parent’s choice. Further when she sees some difficulties to marry with her lover Professor Harish, she readily agrees to lead her life lonely and decides to go to Shantiniketan. When she feels the bleakness in her lover’s passions towards her, influenced by this orientation very decisively she shuns her lover ignoring his plea and keeps the reins in her hands. The determined and unperturbed manner in which she burns his letters shows her resolution to close the chapter and look forward to a meaningful life. She starts her career in some outside territory and seems to be quite remarkable. Even she is able to achieve her lover in the end quite against her family and even at the cost of being a co-wife. In her second novel A Married Woman Manju Kapur again underlines and articulates the central concern of Indian woman. Astha, the protagonist of the novel, is the representative of the women striving to gain their space in life and socio-cultural domains. She is shown as an educated and fiery young woman who dares to venture into uncharted waters and is comfortable with the tag of iconoclast. To certain extent she feels restricted in her expression, checked economically, and disillusioned emotionally. She undertakes a teaching job in order to feel free in financial matters. She starts giving vent to her suppressed spirit in the form of painting when it is choking in her expression. Astha joins a political forum to exert her ideas and even comes to rebellion in the form of following a nationwide march. But more importantly she develops a
homo-sexual relationship and goes too far in her quest for love and sexual gratification justifying her idea of freedom. She finds temporary respite in the arms of Pipeelika, a social worker for an NGO named Ujjala. There is no doubt that many women who have sought to be independent through their work will recognize this situation very clearly. Certainly, the despair that Kapur describes is also real. What is depressing is the way in which her heroine wallows in it. It is not even that she is obsessed with herself or that she is an object of passivity that she enjoys being trampled over. It is the contradiction in her wanting something more and settling for less because that is all she is worth it. A Married Woman is predominantly the story of an artist whose canvas challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Her Home is about the intricate dance of manners that is joint family life. It is the exploring of the life of Nisha, the protagonist of the novel, in the male dominated society. She is the best example of the heroine who suffered a lot throughout her life but lastly the novelist seemed to prove that it never rains but it pours. She claims her space halfway through the novel when she demands an education. But life at university offers little more than cribs to help with her exams. More significantly, she has a clandestine romance with the boy but contrary to her expectation she got neither her love nor her family’s support. She has to find an alternative occupation, putting to use her entrepreneurial genes. The misery does not end here only. She is a mangli girl and as such can be married to only a mangli boy. Finally she gets rid of the parental home and claustrophobia and takes haven in a new home of her own dreams after getting married with Arvind and with her twins. The Immigrant reflects the metamorphosis of the immigrant Nina to one of a confident and settled citizen who is no longer lost in her new world or in the shadows of her husband’s identity. Her emergence into a new woman is discernible in her exploring new avenues by graduating into an NRI accepting all complexities and nuances, her pursuing a course in order to do away with her loneliness, importantly in her exploring new vistas in sexual relationships (extra-marital ones) and finally her further migrating
to the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton to evolve her self quite independently. She joins Library School to pursue a degree there. Here she gets a chance to evolve herself further as may be she:

Became a librarian, and brought home the bacon, she could become a student again and specialise. (6)

Quite recklessly in the Library School she ventures into a love affair thinking it to be the means of liberation from the frustrated life with Ananda, her husband. After having sex with her lover for the first time she feels a sense of her own self, entirely separate from other people, autonomous, independent. She realizes herself a woman of the world, a lover of men. For a second she feels guilty after the sexual encounter with Anton but soon she rationalizes and feels:

That she liked, she had lived. Who can feel guilty about living? Judging from the evidence, and the sexual therapy centers, every citizen in North America regarded good sex as their unalienable right. It was her right too. (7)

Hence her leaving behind her mother, her job, her friends, her precious books, her home town, her country and the so called settled life in Canada, means discarding the identity she created for herself. She finally embarks on her first journey towards independence distancing herself from the dependent life with Ananda and beginning her search for identity in an alien land. She liberates herself from the patriarchal constraints she faced in the story through the various processes that changed her habituated identity. Her emergence into a new woman suggests the ability to choose her own career through education, the ability to decide whether she wants to have children, her sexual freedom, her change in dress and image, and eventually her decision to leave her husband establishing herself in alien surroundings getting herself free from marital oppressive mechanism and living her life on her own accord. Her
emerging in to a new woman suggests how as an immigrant she conforms to the ways of overseas.

Thus we see that era of subjugation is gone and the women have started asserting themselves. The characters portrayed in her novels rebel against their parents and the society and finally succeed in their struggle against the oppressive mechanism of a closed society. But the story does not end here. They cherish this autonomy but at the cost of everything they had previously. As the concept of feminism in Indian society varies from the one in the West, Manju Kapur has tried to evolve her own stream of feminism grounded in reality. She has her own concerns, priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the predicament of her women protagonists. In all her novels it is clearly discernible that a woman’s first encounter with her body becomes a significant point of departure for her. The female body is always at a disadvantage. The woman is either silent about her sexuality as in *Home* or defiant as in *Difficult Daughters* or rebel as in *A Married Woman* and *in The Immigrant*. For a woman, sexuality is a domain of restriction, danger and repression. It can also be argued that sexuality becomes a site of woman’s oppression. Grounded in cultural, religious and social traditions, a woman’s body is pure as long as it is untouched by man. Elements of feminism occur when one has experienced sex. But loss of virginity has multiple implications in women’s life. This may happen in marriage, outside marriage. This inflicts a shame in their lives. What is gratification for a man is a sin for a woman, what is desire for one is a disgrace for the other, what is amusement for one is a scandal for the other.

Actually in our society, a woman cannot survive on her own outside the system in which a place has been assigned to her. Feminine individualism is not acceptable. All the characters of Manju Kapur whether it is Virmati, Astha, Nisha or Nina, move into this forbidden territory. With the result Virmati has to face rejection first at the hand of her mother and later from her own daughter. She denies marrying Inderjeet, the boy of
her parents’ choice, and this becomes a big reason of her helpless condition. And even in the marriage, her qualities, her education are not enough. This shows that even if the girl is good-looking, entry in a respectable house is difficult. It has become clear that there would be no result of women’s education in a society where individual freedom is strictly limited. Education contributes to the social promotion of a girl only in as much as it allows her family to find her a better husband, education is not an end in itself but a long term investment. In order to have an escape Virmati indulges in pre-marital physical relationship with her lover but she realizes the hopelessness of this illicit love when the circumstances force her to be a co-wife of Prof. Harish, her lover. She wants to play the role of an Indian wife but Ganga, the first wife of her husband who doesn’t let her to do those house chores and it is also astonishing that Virmati being an educated lady accepts the role of a typical of Indian wife who finds her happiness in her husband’s happiness. She turns into a block of wood even before the first year of her marriage lapses. In her husband’s company, she becomes a penumbra, a cast shadow as she fails to vindicate her rights and freedom as an individual. Though the social opprobrium is not expressed openly yet she apparently becomes isolated, silent and withdrawn. She is unable to discover her own identity in Harish’s world. She fails to get a sense of belongingness, which is usually shared by couples. Soon she realizes that it is not the world she aspires. She wants to seek her space, her place in her husband’s home and heart. Though she finds it but after much struggle. Thus, though she dares to cross one patriarchal threshold, she is caught into another where her free spirit is curbed and all she does is “adjust, compromise and adapt.” (8) She finds herself dislocated, displaced and disoriented. She suffers both from the loss of identity and alienation at her marital home. Her mind and her heart are constantly agitated, rippled and tumultuous with thoughts of her freedom and position in the society and family. Same condition is with Astha A Married Woman. She has an affair with a woman in a way of keeping her marriage intact. What she is
trying to juggle her own needs and desires with those of her family but it works temporarily only. It is not as though she is very happy with her relationship with her lover or that she uses this relationship in order to leave her family. In the end her husband and children are there with her during exhibition on the opening day. Pipee comes and goes. It is kind of metaphor of what stays and what does not, what you can hang on to and what you can’t. Perhaps this is the point which Manju Kapur states that women do have to compromise. Her children are her primary obligations. She tries to get some personal happiness out of that space but of no avail. Even in the end Pipeelika, her lady lover, accuses her of being a coward. She is disillusioned with her rich family setup. Though she finds solace in the company of another woman but still she is left nowhere. She remains a failure both in her family and in her unauthorized love affair. The same kind of condition is also proved with the example of Nisha in *Home*.

She creates her own business but her creativity is tolerable as long as she is unmarried. After marriage, her husband and his family does not allow her to continue the work. What ever she seems to be in the beginning seems deceptive in the end. She finds herself nothing but a marginalized woman seeking ordinary social levels and emotions. (9)

Nisha has to wait for a very long time in spite of all her physical and mental attainments due to astrological reasons and ultimately surrender into an arranged marriage that too with a widower. She leaves her business to fulfill her duties as a good wife, a daughter-in-law and mother. In *The Immigrant*, Nina also suffers a sense of alienation and insecurity when she starts following her own whims and fancies. She gets disillusioned in her extra marital relationship once she crosses the boundary of her married life. Owing to this infidelity on her part to her husband, she feels vanquished and forlorn. Though her husband is also infidel to her but each time she considers confronting her husband, she
feels the futility. For that to have any real purpose, she would have to confess her own:

She looked the cards of her life as she wondered which hand to deal. In any game she would have flung them down. (10)

For the time being she receives sexual gratification in her post marital relationship yet this love does not sustain longer as it was based on physical plane not on emotional plane. Eventually frustration and disillusionment are in her store which forces her to leave her once settled family.

These characters try to liberate themselves from the pangs of orthodoxy but their course of lifer has not been that easy in their family, before or after marriage. They decisions have been, to certain extent, not their own, but in the compliance in the decisions of others. All these female characters rebel against society or patriarchal norms to make their own destiny but male dominance has ever been a hinderence. Here it is not irrelevant to say that it is the irony of Manju Kapur’s women that:

There comes a transitional phase in their life and they tend to come, become different from a traditional woman and want to break out into new paths. However, the change is more of theoretical in nature. When it comes to reality after boldness in them, they lack courage and resume to patriarchal hegemony. What happens to Virmati’s, Astha and Nisha is no doubt the most representative destiny of the Indian woman even if educated. We all know about women’s emancipation today but the day following yesterday things might have changed, but how much really? Even today, thousands of girls sit within the four walls of their houses and wonder why they do not have the right to choose their own lives, decide for themselves whether they want to be homemakers or more. Marriage is still the reason for their birth. (11)
To some extent this is vindictive that in our real life also we feel helpless in front of our destiny. Manju Kapur speaks of the idea of independence: independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and also independence yearned after by a woman. Here the vindication of a woman’s self expression is put in a marginal position.

Over the past decade, in fiction and autobiography, South Asian women have begun to explore the stories of their pasts in an efflorescence of writings. Among others, Mrinal Pande, Manju Kapur and Suguna Iyer have accomplished this through the medium of fiction, while Sara Suleri, Yasmin Alibhai Brown and Mira Kamdar stand out their memories. (12)

We find Manju Kapur in total agreement with what the veteran feminist, Simon de Beauvoir too holds:

We open factories, the offices the facilities to woman but we continue to hold that marriage is for her a most honorable career freeing her from the need of any other participation in the collective life. (13)
Works Cited

7. Ibid., p. 263.