Chapter 2
Choice

Choice is the joker in life’s Pack of cards.

Life is a constant series of choices.

Some you make and some are inevitably made for you.

(Gokhale 71)

Choice implies broadly the freedom to choose. Freedom is of some intrinsic value in a person’s life. To attain that, choosing is an important activity. Indeed, “Aristotle had seen the ability to choose as one of the distinguishing features that makes human beings different from lower animals, whose acts done can be described as voluntary, but not chosen”(32). Thus, to attain freedom, freedom of thought and actions must be united. The concept of choice plays main role in Robert Frost’s poem in Road Not Taken:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and
I took the only less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference. (18-20)

Here, the road represents the choice every individual faces sometime or the other in his/her life. The choice of a career, the choice of a life partner and all big choices man or woman makes constitute the components of life. One never knows whether the decision he/she is taking will prove to be good for him in the long run or will leave him with regret at not having chosen the other. Still he has to make a choice and this is the irony of life. Free will is that humans have the power to freely choose between alternatives and shape their destiny, which is similar to Emerson’s saying “As a man thinketh, so is he, and as a man chooseth so is he” (quotd.org). The
present chapter deals with the choices that Manju Kapur’s characters make in their course of life.

Manju Kapur’s novels are insight into the anticipation of Indian Women, the choices they make and the choices made for them. In the choice of life, the protagonists of her novels feel comfortable and satisfied. They are not ashamed of their choices. As adapted life never comforts them in some point of time, they come out of that life to live the aspired existence. The heroines Virmati in Difficult Daughters, Astha in A Married Woman, Nisha in Home, Nina in The Immigrant, Shagun and Ishita in Custody substantiate their choice of their optional life. Except Virmati in Difficult Daughters, the main characters in all the other novels of Manju Kapur, married a partner of their parents’ choice.

Kapur states that in India modern emancipated women have started to choose their own lives and to decide for themselves, whether they want to be homemakers or more. In her first novel, she talks about the choices made by Virmati in the postmodernist manner. The novel portrays the life of Virmati through her daughter Ida and her family members. Ida finds that her mother struggles between the choice of living a traditional life and leading a life of modernity. The novel is a powerful tale of three generations. It is about the central figure Virmati who is caught between tradition and modernity. The story begins with the death of Virmati. In the burial ceremony, Ida, the narrator of the novel, states: “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. Now she was gone and I stared at the fire” (Kapur 1).

Ida is now a divorcee and a childless woman. She was not able to develop an understanding with her mother during her life time. However after Virmati’s death, her realisation engulfs her with guilt. Ida sets out on a journey into her mother’s past
by piercing together the fragments of memory in search of a woman she could know and understand. Virmati was evasive about her past to Ida and now Ida hopes to fill the critical gaps, by making a nostalgic journey back to the childhood haunts of her mother. Along with Ida, the consciousness of the reader shuttles between the present and the past, when she visits different places and meets her mother’s relatives and acquaintances.

From them she comes across the letters written to her mother by her father. With these hints and pieces of evidence, she recreates her mother’s story from the past which includes her grandmother’s story as well. Through the sensitive portrayal of three generations of women and their problems, Nirmala, the critic states: “Manju Kapur has given us an unforgettable picture of the evolution of the Indian woman’s psyche over time, starting from the pre-independence period through the independence era up to the time of the post-independence” (58). Virmati’s life is described in great detail than that of her grandmother or that of Ida. Ida comes to know that her mother “…studied more than any other girl in this family” (Kapur 5). Ida is told about her grandmother Kasturi that, she “was always sick” (4). The reason for being sick all the time is very much clear by the remarks of Kasturi’s sister-in-law. Kasturi always felt tired, and her feet and legs ached all the time, because of her ever pregnancy. Virmati took care of the rest of the ten children. In performing her duties towards the family and her mother, she loses her childhood and becomes mature in her early stage. Whenever she needs attention from her mother, she gets the same remarks: “You are the eldest. If you don’t see to things, who will?” (6).

When Virmati is of seventeen, even at that time, her mother becomes pregnant, because of which she could not pass through F.A Examination. Virmati
never gets affection, love, care and affection from her mother. The dialogue between Virmati and her mother Kasturi, shows Virmati’s feelings. Thus throughout the novel, Virmati can be seen as an emotionally starved being. Virmati belongs to an Arya Samaj family. She is sent to an Arya Samaj school and then to a Samaj college. In her case, therefore the values taught outside the home are not at all different from those insisted upon at home. Her family believes that the structure of education will emphasize reading, writing, balancing household accounts and sewing. Above all, the rituals of Arya Samaj are expected to train women as good wives and mothers.

Virmati’s mother Kasturi completed her eighth standard. She spends the entire life either cooking in the kitchen or performing religious rites. She feels that there is no future for her other than being a wife and a mother. She believes that her daughter would also live like that. So Virmati is trained in housekeeping at the early age of ten. She being the eldest in the family of eleven children, is asked to play a second mother to her siblings. In her family education is important only from the matrimonial point of view. Singh rightly says “Naturally in this set-up and with this social requirement the role of education neither aimed at the growth of individuality nor did it promise independence to women” (165).

As the eldest child, Virmati has to run the house and look after her younger brother and sisters. However she is very bossy and other children are scared of her. “By the time Virmati was ten, she was as attuned to signs of her mother’s pregnancies as Kasturi herself” (Kapur 6). She tries her best to protect herself from the comments of her aunt Lajwanti, who lives next door. She has only two children Shakuntala and Samnath. Lajwanti never misses a chance to make fun of Kasturi’s continued fertility in producing eleven children. But Virmati carefully looks after eleven siblings. Her
mother keeps asking her “Have you seen to their food-milk-clothes-studies?”

Virmati is always almost seen tired and harassed due to her weary work. Torn between her household responsibilities and her love for studies, she turns into a brisk and a bad tempered girl. She becomes restless due to her endless household duties. Without understanding her mental state, Kasturi thinks “Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster” (11). The arrival of Shakuntala is an eye opener for young Virmati.

Virmati’s desire for studies is influenced by her cousin’s words that she actively engages herself in traveling, entertaining, reading, learning and attending to academic deliberations, which thrill her ignorant mind. But Kasturi does not approve the idea of Shakuntala. According to her: “Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family” (14). But Virmati wishes to follow the ideals of Shakuntala who invites her to move out of the house as times are changing. Virmati is full of admiration and love for Shakuntala, who has tasted the wine of freedom to do whatever she thinks fit with her life. She is an M.Sc Chemistry graduate and has her own views about living life. She symbolises modernity. Virmati is fascinated to hear from her that she participated in the political Gandhian movement. She is a fearless woman. Virmati comes to know that there is world beyond marriage. The conversation between Shakuntala and Virmati gives us the clear picture of Shakuntala’s view: “We travel, entertain ourselves in the evenings, follow each other’s work, read papers, attend seminars. One of them is even going a broad for higher studies” (15).

Virmati also wants to continue her education and emulate Shakuntala. But she lacks the will power to go against the wishes of her mother. When she conveys her
wishes, her mother is least sympathetic to her demands. When she fails in her FA. exams, her mother feels annoyed. Similarly, when Virmati points out that Shakuntala has worked hard to get into Lahore College for her degree, her mother bursts out: “Now it is you who are eating my head. What good are Shaku’s degrees when she is not settled. Will they look after her when she is old? ... At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother” (19).

This sort of argument sets the pattern of their relationship. There is no female bonding, or emotional depth in Virmati’s relation with her mother that it is possible to be something other than a wife. These new ideas and thoughts churning in Virmati’s mind challenges the traditional role of an elder female in a family. Shakuntala’s visit actually makes Virmati realizes how much she hates the idea of a typical, traditional marriage and the life of a housewife. In fact for the first time she thinks about her future and she explains her position in the following way: “The evening is coming. The light in the angan grows dimmer and more mellow. You have taught me to notice such things…. I go to sleep early, and get up with Sun” (81). But she finds it difficult to realize her dream.

The girl who wants to further her studies is engaged to a canal engineer. Her family pressurises her to accept the alliance. She agrees though passively. But the marriage is postponed to a year because of her great aunt’s death. It is this year that changes the story of her life, the very course of her life. Due to the postponement of marriage, she is allowed to pursue her higher studies. The new education and close observation of the life of Kasturi, generate a new urge and emotion in Virmati to get herself free from the bondage of patriarchy that denies her freedom and choice.
The education versus marriage argument is reiterated many times in the novel but when Virmati gets permission to study further, one is forced to accept that the changing times have brought more and better educational opportunities for women. The conflict intensifies when Virmati begins to assert her independence. Marriage was no longer a cherished goal for her. (Verma 154)

But to her mother, Virmati’s independence seems to be an expression of selfishness and ingratitude. Here, Kasturi unknowingly becomes the voice of patriarchy. Virmati after clearing her F.A. Exams, enrolls in a college for B.A. The undergraduate studies makes her more interested in further studies.

In the meantime, England returned professor, Harish Chandra, who is already married comes to live next to Virmati’s house. Having nothing much in common with his homely, illiterate wife Ganga, the Professor starts seeking an intellectual dalliance with the fresh, inquisitive Virmati and soon found himself falling in love with her. By the time Virmati passes her FA. Exams; in the eyes of her parents, she has done enough studies and her fiance’s parents also think “…She was already well qualified to be the wife of their son, the canal engineer. They did not want too much education in their daughter-in-law, even though times were changing” (Kapur 4). But due to the death of the canal engineer’s father, marriage is postponed.

Virmati finds an opportunity to get her admission to A.S College. Classroom is the only place where the Professor sees her. And Virmati appears to be flower like against the back drop of male students. The Professor feels the pulse of love, because one day he notices Virmati intensely staring at him. But the real reason is different. She suffers from short sight. So he takes her to the eye doctor and she starts putting
on glasses. “With them, she looked more studious, less flower-like and appealing. But by then, the Professor’s desire to possess had extended to her heart and mind” (43). By introducing Virmati to the canons of English Literature, the great Western civilizations and the nuances of cultured living, the Professor succeeds in providing her false feeling of women’s emancipation.

After finishing B.A. degree, she tells the Professor about her engagement. Despite this information, the Professor is deeply infatuated with her. The narrator says: “That he looked at her, she knew. That he paid attention to her, she was aware…. He spread his anguish at her feet, and demanded that she do with him as she pleased” (50). He tries to dissuade her to marry Inderjeet. The Professor informs Virmati that he was forced to marry a three year old girl. His wife is an illiterate. She does not have the inclination to educate herself. Therefore she has failed to satisfy the intellectual thirst of the Professor. That void has been neatly filled in by the arrival of Virmati. The Professor cites a reason to express his love and Virmati gets trapped. She makes a choice. She prefers the professor to Inderjeet. She feels “whatever might be the consequences, she must continue her course” (53).

At that time Virmati receives a letter from Inderjeet which states that as he is very busy with his bridge project he is unable to meet her and he would come to Amritsar shortly. Virmati reads this brief letter several times. In her pocket she has another letter, which is a part of a correspondence the Professor has insisted on keeping, although she has not seen the need. But now Virmati unfolds the professor’s latest offering which runs, “So darling, you can imagine the state I am in these days. To have your family still labour under the delusion that you are going to marry some clottish canal engineer agitates me greatly…. If not you, then someone else” (52).
Virmati places the letters, the Professor’s crushed letter and the finance’s legitimate letter, on the parapet. She keeps staring at them.

Quickly she tore up the latter and scattered the pieces over the wall. Wasn’t her future partner decided by the first touch of a man on her body? Even though in this case it meant humiliating her grandfather, who was publicly associated with female education, betraying her father who had allowed her to study further, and spoiling the marriage chances of her siblings. (53).

At home, Kasturi’s identification with Virmati does not let her realize her daughter’s need for a separate identity and independent existence. So Virmati has to rebel. She rejects the world of domesticity, marriage and child-bearing all that her mother stood for and accepts a new world of knowledge and self assurance, a world to which her mother has no passport. Her rebellion against her mother is on account of her mother’s indifference to her emotions. “At times Virmati yearned for affection for some sign that she was special” (6). According to Verma

Virmati’s case seems to follow the Classic description of the eldest daughter in Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. Her relationship with her mother is most problematic. She was most often the one who had to do all daily chores and was often abused for no apparent reason by her mother. (155)

This is because Kasturi, her mother, saw in her a rival who was capable of challenging her world. Virmati thus becomes a “Substitute” and not a “double” that every mother wants her daughter to be. The language of feeling has never flown between them and this threat is meant to express all her suppressed yearnings. At the juncture of being engaged to Inderjeet, she, incited by Professor, could not understand
which way to opt. This dilemma disturbs her so much that makes her to commit suicide by dipping into the Ganges. Fortunately, she is saved. Now innumerable agonies enter into Virmati’s life. Though she is rescued, life has becomes cruel to her. Kasturi, instead of showing compassion, behaves most inhumanly to her.

Virmati is confined to a store-room. She is not allowed to even mingle with her sibling. This stigma detaches her from her parents. All the elderly persons in the family decide that Virmati should not marry. Instead, Indumati, her second sister is married to Inderjeet. Virmati and the Professor continue to exchange love letters through the youngest sister Paro. Barbuddhe observes: “Virmati clearly disapproves the plan of leaving the professor at the beginning but she is unable to withstand daily struggles. She is in a situation where making choice has become very difficult” (72-73). Her family members are shocked when they come to know about Virmati’s plan of committing suicide. They doubt “…Was this all her education had taught her? To put herself before others, and damn the rest?” (Kapur 79).

In the letters to the Professor, Virmati never addresses him directly, and closes her letter with the alphabet “V”. But the professor uses the words “precious love”, “Vir, love”, “Viru sweet heart”, “Vir darling”, to address her and closes the letter with “H”. In one of her letters, Virmati writes: “On Mahatmaji’s birthday, they allowed me to join them in spinning. We spun the whole morning” (85). Virmati’s parents want a promise from her that she will never meet the professor again. They think that a person who is already married and a traitor to his wife can never make Virmati happy. In the winter nights, the family members take her out and again lock in the godown during daytime.
Virmati is angry each time she is locked. Virmati does not know why she is locked in the godown like a sack of wheat or dal. The love letters to the professor seem to console her with the lines “There is a God who looks after lovers” (88). The professor knows that the winds of opposition are hovering over them. He mentions this in a letter written to her. Reading and re-reading of Virmati’s letters makes him feel good. In his letters he refers to the prevailing political turmoil: “After ten weeks of war, Britain remains strong, at least according to Churchill, and they might be successful in convincing Germany about a cease fire” (89). Sometimes he writes news of the national movement:

Yesterday a huge demonstration was held at Jallianwala Bagh criticizing the Punjab Government for not controlling prices and checking profiteering. With so much agitation there is bound to be some positive outcome. Then they will have less reason to pressurize me to move. (92-93)

Through one of these letters we come to know about the details of the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to Amritsar. The Professor describes the visit but he claims that his heart is not in it. Virmati is aware of the Professor’s love for her but at the same time she is also conscious of the opposition in the two families to accept their unacceptable desires. She knows that her affair would damage the reputation of her family and the prospects of her sisters. As an Indian daughter she thinks of her parents, but as an individual she longs for her lover.

Education has helped both Virmati and the professor to think intelligently about themselves. The Professor seems to regret his early marriage but he is sure that “The tradition that refuses to entertain doubt, or remains impervious to new thoughts
and ideas, becomes a prison rather than a sustaining life force” (94). He thinks that the society is responsible for not educating his wife, Ganga. In his view marriage without love and happiness is futile and that is the reason why he is in love again. At the same time he retains his wife too. He respects the tradition of a husband looking after his wife. However, Virmati’s love for the professor makes her disobey her tradition and long for higher education.

In *Difficult Daughters*, thus, we have learnt about the choice made by Virmati. Even after knowing the fact that the Professor is a married man, she continues to entertain his love. Because it is the Professor who has made her feel that she should break all the restrictions imposed on her by the family. The Professor promises her a new life, higher education and freedom. She wants to establish her individuality. Thereafter, she chooses the company of the Professor. Equally, the Professor blames the tradition which insists on child weddings. At the same time he does not neglect the duty of a married man. So he comes forward to keep his legal wife with him. Yet the intellect and the adult passion, he feels, could get quenched only with Virmati. Therefore he keeps loving Virmati.

Women in order to achieve their freedom seek marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. The protagonist Astha in *A Married Woman* objects to the role of a daughter and longs to play the role of a wife with a hope that her new role will help in winning her freedom. It is their custom that in the early morning all of them do paranayam together in the patchy grass surrounded by a short hedge outside their flat. Sometimes Astha’s father takes her out for a stroll through the colony in the evenings. The parents are worried about buying a plot or a house in Delhi.
Astha is brought up in a traditional homely environment in a typical middle
class family. She is the only child of the simple, God-fearing parents who are very
protective of her and expect her to confirm to traditions. Her mother, a traditional
woman considers the daughter as a liability, rather than an asset. The mother wants
her to learn the virtues of tradition and asks her to read the Vedas, the Upa
nishads, and the Gita which teaches how to live. Her mother believes in the vision of Shastras
which state: “if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be
condemned to perpetual rebirth?” (1). Therefore, she persuades her daughter to get
married soon. “Every day in her temple corner in the kitchen, she prayed for a good
husband for her daughter” (1).

On the other hand Astha’s father stands for modernity and wants to adorn her
daughter with good education. He wants to make her fit for future as an independent
individual of the society, which could be strengthened by reading a number of books
based on moral and intellectual substance. At the same time he too believes that
knowing the culture of a nation will enable a person to be equally great, provided,
possible attempts are taken. He directs her that you need a sense of your cultural
background “Of what made this country great” (27). Thus none of her parents have
known their daughter’s interest in painting. Being brought up in such an atmosphere,
Asth’s natural talent for painting takes a back-seat and her “…diet of mushy novels
and thoughts of marriage” (8), gives her the wings to search for a boy friend.

From her young age, Astha entertains romantic thoughts of finding a proper
companion. When her mother asks her to pray for a good husband “Asth obediently
closed her eyes to delicious images of a romantic, somewhat shadowy young man
holding her in his strong manly embrace” (1). When her mother suspiciously asks her,
“Are you praying?” (2). She replies indignantly that “you never trust me” (2). To prove her sincerity she fixes her gaze firmly on Lord Krishna with the expectations that “He would send her marriage, love and happiness.” (2).

As an adolescent, Astha seems to protest and express her agitation and indignation whenever she gets smothered by her parents. She invariably craves for true love. By the time Astha becomes sixteen, “she was prey to inchoate longings, desired almost every boy she saw, then stood long hours before the mirror marvelling at her ugliness. Would she ever be happy? Would true love ever find her?” (8). Romantic feelings of love flutter in her virgin heart right from teenage. She falls in different forms of love with different persons of her choice from adolescent age to middle age. At this juncture, she meets Bunty, a handsome soldier boy who makes friendly visits to her house. Her love with Bunty can be considered as infatuation. She likes him very much “Day and night the thought of him kept her insides churning; she was unable to eat, sleep, or study” (8). But this love is short lived, because Bunty stops coming to her house after some time. Only later she comes to know that it is her mother who is instrumental in sowing the seeds of discord in her daughter’s friendship with Bunty. When Astha was doing her second year course in English literature, her mother starts to see the matrimonial pages meticulously, to find a nice suitor for her daughter. In conversation with Astha’s father, she utters that,

There is a time for everything, went on the mother. The girl is blossoming now. When the fruit is ripe it has to be picked. Later she might get into the wrong company and we will be left wringing our hands. If she marries at this age, she will have no problem adjusting. We are not so young that we can afford to wait. (20)
Accordingly, a suitor comes for Astha. When the official gentleman-caller comes for Astha, she is not at all ready to meet the stranger. She does not like the choice made by her parents. Astha feels “….collapsed against the bathroom door, tears falling, 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 who advertised for a wife and asked about sports” (21). Astha remains in the bathroom even after the suitor left. One month after this, a boy by name Rohan appears in her life.

Through the friends she gets to know about him. She falls in love with Rohan. But that love is also short lived because Rohan after clearing his exams, leaves for Oxford for higher studies as solicited by his father. Astha feels very small by comparing her life with Rohan. She thinks that her father is a minor bureaucrat. He has never studied abroad and his “…sole possession was 280 square yards in the wilderness beyond the Jamuna” (29). Astha feels hopeless. She begins to detest Rohan. She knows that he does not have the backbone to confirm his love. She knows that her love with Rohan is over. She has become a victim of male passion. Rohan does not realize this emotional disturbance. He happily goes abroad and Astha feels bored. However she decides to study M.A.

Parents of marriageable girls become upset if they do not get any formal proposals from eligible boys. Before Astha becomes panicky, she receives a proposal from a US returned business man with an MBA. At first Astha objects to it when her parents tell her the news. Later, when her father tells about the positive fact about the boy that he is the only son and both his sisters are married, she agrees. Her mother also says that he is clearly a good, family-minded boy, and also adds that, the boy
does not believe in dowry. It could be the foreign influence. Astha shows greater interest when she hears more about Hemant, the foreign returned MBA.

The engagement gets over and both start dating. The marriage takes place on an auspicious day. In the early years of her marriage, she becomes captivated by the magic of their sexual life. In her honeymoon she compares Rohan with Hemant. She thinks that Rohan had abandoned her, but Hemant has married her. Hemant values her deeply and tells her that he is happy because he wanted to marry “an innocent, unspoilt, simple girl” (41). And it is fulfilled because he thinks that Astha is a virgin. But Astha asks herself whether “Had she been a virgin?” (41). But she decides to stop thinking about the past. Thus “Indian adolescents invariably hide their dating affairs from their subsequent lovers/ friends to avoid misunderstanding and pinpricks and the accompanying tension in married life” (Gnanamony 168). As a happily married woman in the initial years of her marriage, she looks forward to a physical union with her husband and enjoys it immensely. She is satisfied physically as well as aesthetically. Hemant’s appreciation of her poem and the sketch that she has made bolstered up her confidence. She feels that her life is opening up before her golden vistas. Astha has always been inclined towards writing. Earlier she used to write a diary where she jotted down all that she felt and experienced. And the new experience provides her an opportunity to do the same. However, she does not neglect her familial role.

As a good wife and daughter-in-law, she does her duty to their likings. Her deeply entrenched roots of submission, passivity and devotion to the family, guide her always. She has seen her mother forever sacrificing for the family and husband, and she too does just that. Her life is chalked out for her. Achieving intimacy seems to be
the ultimate end of her married life. The days pass by and Astha has not imagined that sex could be such a master. She says that “I haven’t really lived, thought Astha, till now I did not know what life was all about. She felt a woman of the world, the world that was covered with the film of her desire, and the fluids of their sex” (Kapur 46).

After her marriage with Hemant, Astha has gathered the impression that Hemant is going to encourage her writing. May be she could become a poet as soul-mate, Astha finds completion in her role of an ideal wife and as ideal daughter-in-law. Everything goes well. She is proud to be the vital part of the family, to share all its problems and she assures the family members of the possible solutions too. Hemant’s attitude towards Astha’s parents is also very cordial and it makes her feel further proud of her possession-her husband. Astha never shares her happiness with any one, for to share it with any one, would break the union. Astha’s marital life thus becomes unexpectedly good. She feels that her husband is the best person in the whole world. So much so, that she keeps conceding her desire that “…she longed to dissolve herself in him, longed to be the sips of water he drank, longed to be the morsels of food he swallowed” (46). Her mental state reveals the psychology of a typical Indian girl for whom a happy marriage happens to be the greatest achievement in life. Her academic performance had been average throughout her school and college years. But once she takes up a job at the school, she sees the difference and starts enjoying the financial independence and the security that came along the recognition and appreciation for her work. “It gives a boost to her individuality” (9).

Most of the adolescent girl or boy, irrespective of caste, community, creed and nationality, falls in love at first sight. Astha too is not an exception. The adolescent age is known for thoughtless love. Astha proves to be a thoughtless woman, because she
is unable to understand the meaning of the word love. It is not love but only infactuation that she experienced in the company of Bunty and Rohan earlier. Both these men were her choice. When her choice does not materialize, Astha feels that the selection made by her parents would do good for her. Therefore, she agreed to marry Hemant. In other words, Astha has realized the strength of arranged marriage. The choice made by Virmati in Difficult Daughters and the choice made by Astha’s parents on behalf of their child, could be compared and contrasted with the heroine of Kapur’s novel Home

While perusing Kapur’s third novel Home, one can understand that the protagonist, Nisha is an educated woman. She asserts her womanhood boldly because she is iconoclastic and modern in her approach to life. As a modern woman she revolts against the old family system. Yet she never crosses the boundaries of morality and values. P.C. Pradhan comments that:

In her latest novel Home, Kapur is able to give us a protagonist Nisha who is both modern and Indian -calm, composed and complete unlike the extremist protagonists such as Virmati of Difficult Daughters and Astha of A Married Woman. (119)

Nisha’s family is so steeped in tradition. The women in the family practically observe every prescribed fast, puja and ritual. It is the duty of the woman to rear the children in accordance with the ways of Banwari Lal household. It teaches them to revere old values and keep extended family structure in tact. Her family belongs to a class of people whose skills have been honed over generations to ensure prosperity in the market place. From an early age, children are trained to maintain the foundation on which these homes rested. The education they received, the values they imbibed,
and the alliances they made protect their lives. Banwari Lal is a believer in the old ways that men work out of the home, women within; men carry the family life forward, women enable their mission.

*Home* is about the family of Lala Banwari Lal, who has two sons, Yashpal and Pyarelal and a daughter Sunita. She has already got married and has a son by name Vicky. After an accidental death of Sunita, her son Vicky is taken to Lal’s home. Yashpal marries Sona. Sona’s sister Rupa is the wife of an educated, but badly paid servant, Premnath. As Sona does not conceive for a long time, her mother-in-law assigns to her the responsibility of looking after Vicky. Pyare Lal marries Sushila. The couple give birth to Ajay after one year of their marriage. Kapur hints at the significance of male child in the traiditional family through the following lines:

Great was the jubilation at this first grandchild. (Sunita’s son Vicky, born six years earlier, did not count.) The male line was augmented, courtesy of Sushila and Pyare Lal. A boy brought up within the nurturing ambit of the shop would in turn ensure its continuing prosperity when he grew up. (14-15)

Sona feels miserable to be a second mother of Vicky. She keeps fasting for a long time for the want of a child. “Every Tuesday she fasted. Previously she would eat fruit and drink milk once during this day, now she converted to a nirjal fast. No water from sun-up to sundown” (15). But it does not help her in any way.

For the first 10 years of her marriage she is childless, which makes her a subject of resentment and pity (and some gloating) among the other women in the house—it being understood that a woman’s prime function is to serve as the vessel that will bring forth the next generation. (1)
So Yashpal plans to visit a shrine at Chetai near Almora. It is believed that the Goddess of the mountain is very powerful. Two months later Sona comes to know that she has conceived. She gives birth to a girl baby. By seeing the girl child Nisha, the nurse says “She will bring great wealth to her family, be its goddess Lakshmi” (36). Here Kapur suggests that most of the Indian family consider the girl baby as a symbol of prosperity in the form of Goddess. It is true that a female child is also respected in a family. But when compared to the first born, namely the male child, a girl or a woman attains only a second position or a secondary status.

The passion for the male child continues forever in an Indian family household. Thus the birth of a beautiful girl baby does not reduce the insecurity in Sona’s mind. It is only after the birth of her son, Raju, that she gains confidence as a woman who has done her duty to the family. Meanwhile, Sushila gives birth to her second son Vijay. So Vicky, Ajay, Vijay and Raju are the representative of the third generation. Surrounded with boys, Nisha becomes the centre of attention of the family, as she is the first girl baby that too after ten years.

The family believes that it is Nisha who is going to maintain the strong foundation and hold the tradition and culture in order to safeguard the family esteem. So Nisha is trained from childhood to be docile, submissive, and polite, from an early age. Sona concentrates on Nisha’s beauty. By Sona’s constant care “Nisha grew into the family princess” (53) taking care of her skin, hair and dressing. On observing the growth of her daughter, Sona says: “You take after me. When I was young people used to say I was like the moon, the champa flower, the lotus. And when your father saw me, she stopped and giggled, he said he would become a monk if he couldn’t marry me. Even so, my father was not keen” (52).
Thus the mother feels proud of her daughter’s beauty. Every mother in Lal’s household is engaged in the welfare of their children and nobody is there to fulfill the happiness of Vicky. They fail to pay more attention to him. One day, Vicky and Nisha, who are brother and sister, start playing together and are found to be bantering on the terrace. When Nisha wants him to play chess with her, he happens to touch her soft thighs. Encharmed by the softness of her body, he touches her private parts. Kapur makes a matter-of-fact description of an incestuous incident in her novel.

Nisha is younger to Vicky. She does not realize the seriousness of the incident. But when the unpleasant act is repeated after a few days in the room, she feels that “she wanted to die of shame” (62). But Nisha is threatened not to divulge this secret to anyone. The child’s psyche is brutally bruised. The thought of this incident hangs heavy like a dark cloud over her mind. She loses her appetite and remains always frightened, gloomy and lost. She screams during her sleep. Everyone in the house feels that something has scared her in the house but no one can even suspect Vicky’s role in it.

The novelist is quite successful in bringing out the fact that in so many joint families, the female is always victimized in the name of relations. Sex, a natural physical urge, is also perceived from this angle. Education has also defined its boundary and therefore the pursuit of a desirable behavior becomes a mandatory effort on the part of an individual young or old; male or female. But the concept of sex has to be taught well; otherwise it would degenerate into incest or adultery. This is the case of Vicky. In the absence of parental care, vulnerability creeps in. The discretion to differentiate what is good and bad gets lost and only the lowest part of a persona the “Id” or animal instinct or desire becomes activated.
Children abuse each other or they are totally abused by the elders. Most of the twentieth century novels focus on the child abuse. Arundati Roy’s *The God of Small of Things* bears similarity with *Home* in the sense that in *Home*, children fall a prey to each other, especially, the female child is victimized by the male, and in *The God of Small of Things* it is the other situation. Children are abused by the elders. The analysis makes it clear that self-discipline or voluntary discipline is preferable to mandatory discipline or imposed discipline and therein lies the harmony of hearts and houses. Besides, the novelist wants us to be aware of the prevalence of child abuse.

Kapur objectively describes how a girl child is sexually harassed and threatened by the male. And that leads to Nisha’s mental agony. The child feels lonely and depressed and the fact that she has to conceal the whole event from others disrupts her mental peace. The child wants to be away from the male victor. But she is prevented from openly acknowledging the dirty act or expressing a desire that she needs conducive and protective environment. The incident helps us to explore the boundaries of human culture. A set of ideas, beliefs, customs and practices imposed on people is always called culture. But many fail to adhere to it.

Nisha is a traumatized child. After a thoughtful consideration, she is sent to live with her aunt, Rupa where she stays for ten years. Her aunt’s love and her uncle’s care and her literary taste serve as the shaping influences on her. After the arrival of Nisha “The childless Rupa was now partially blessed. Her sister’s prayers had benefited her as well, and the day Nisha moved in with her aunt, she felt she had not valued their efficacy enough” (Kapur 67). While Nisha sleeps between her aunt and uncle, Rupa is amused to see the soft feet and hands of the young girl. Here, the novelist discusses the childless Rupa’s motherly attention. Though Nisha is the only
girl child in her home, the family members fail to give adequate attention to Nisha. Only when she comes to Rupa’s house she gets proper attention.

In the new environment she blooms like a flower but in her home “Sadly, Nisha’s academic merits are not valued in her own family, where culinary and household skills are only accepted and expected credits for a girl” (Arthi 5). Nisha has a passive and happy life in her aunt’s home. When Nisha finishes her play school, Prem Nath tries to choose a school by visiting all the suitable institutions in the area and he fills in every available form to admit her to a good school. He knows that his family members would only recommend a girls’ school, for “A girls’ school would provide a traditional upbringing, and after her probable experience it was best there be no exposure to boys.

The school had to have labs, the girl should be able to do science if she wanted” (74). Finally he chooses the New Horizon Public School. Thus the pattern of Nisha’s next ten years is now set. She spends all week with her aunt and uncle. And for the week-ends she would come home to live with her parents. During her visit, her father makes sure that Vicky is never close to her. Emphatically, the changes in surroundings change everything, associated with Nisha. “Three years have passed since her removal to her aunt’s house, and the dark thing inside her is deeply buried” (Kapur 81).

Meanwhile the family takes the responsibility of Vicky’s marriage, “The family has seen to an orphaned child’s welfare, and is transmitting him with a sure hand into the future, equipped with the responsibilities of adulthood (employment) and the rites of manhood (marriage)” (80). Vicky also begins by responding to the queries of his cousins. He shows his maturity in handling the situation.
To express his opinion about the new would-be bride, he says: “she is nice, she is good, sweet, and docile. All this was pre-determined by the mechanics of choice. There is no room for anything but hopeful, fervent liking” (90). Kapur beautifully portrays the newly married couple’s love: “Love is going to begin. Fated, ordained love, unquestioned, unexamined love” (90).

Kapur places a lot of emphasis on the cultural conditioning of the girl child in the Indian set up. Through the character of Nisha, the novelist explores the manner in which Indian girls are moulded to suit the needs and imperatives of a patriarchal society from a social and psychoanalytic angle. The core philosophy of traditional family is emphasised through Nisha’s mother who wants her to be “groomed in the traditions of the Banwari Lal household” (92). But Nisha, at the age of ten, proves to be a rebellious girl. When her mother asks her to fast for the future husband, she states that all these facts and observations are irrational she says “why should I? That’s for older women. She didn’t want to spend the day without food or water.” (93). To her mother, cooking and marriage are more important than education. Similarly, Rama Mehta’s novel Inside the Haveli also narrates that “a girl has to marry, if not today them tomorrow” (247), because Indian families believe that “marriage is the only security for women” (88). Sona expects Nisha to be good at household work. But Nisha’s negligence or indifference makes her worried. Therefore, Sona gives the pundit five thousand rupees, for the puja so that “The girl would be married off to a tree, or a plant, or the sun, anything that would absorb the evil of the planets, and everything would be all right” (Kapur 93). Then for a few days Nisha stays at home to learn how to be a good wife through the Karva Chauth Katha fasting. All the women in the family gather to perform the puja after listening to a story. The story is about
the girl who gets her husband’s life back after his death by undertaking Karva Chauth fasting.

The girl’s husband has faced his death because of his wife’s inability to fast. The story concludes that “the girl who was so foolish could be them, the woman who was so self-disciplined could be them” (95). When Nisha protests against her mother, Sona scolds her and says: “That girl should have followed her elders and not eaten by herself. After all, no one else was eating, were they? She was trying to be independent, and you can see the consequences” (95). Sona plans for her daughter’s marriage. But the horoscope states that Nisha has an unfortunate fate life. So the mother has to seek a man with a similar unfortunate horoscope. Only then Nisha’s marriage would take place. In order to compensate this set back, Sona, the “hectoring mother” doubles her effort at grooming Nisha in the Indian way to become an impeccable woman with impeachable credentials in the art of service and domesticity.

To Sona “The art of service and domesticity should shine in her daughter so brightly that she would overcome her negative Karma to be a beacon in her married home” (129). The women of the family gather for another puja, the Vat Savitri Katha. Sona starts the book by saying to Nisha “Listen and like Savitri be a beacon in your married home” (130). It is also about how Savitri regained her husband Satyavan from death through prayer and fasts. Sona wants Nisha to be a selfless woman like Savitri. She has oversimplified the role of Savitri. She highlights how the ideals of womanhood purveyed over and over again in the numerous myths and legends that form the Hindu collective unconscious memory. It is true that these myths leave women cocooned in ignorance so much that women in general are complacent about their secondary status. “Sadly, Savitri’s determination, her courage, wit and will
power get overshadowed and neglected in the urge to present her as a selfless and sacrificing woman, in the manner Sona does” (Arthi 6).

To those of us who may argue that such primitive ideas about women are no longer prevalent and are non-existent in the modern day context, Sudhir kakar, an eminent psychologist and culture theorist, has the answer. According to him:

The ideal of womanhood which, inspite of many changes in individual circumstances in the course of modernization, urbanization and education, still governs the inner imagery of individual men and women as well as the social relations between them in both the traditional and modern sectors of the Indian community. (57)

Manju Kapur analyses the concept of Indian womanhood from the perspective of myths and puranas. It is true that every Indian woman is expected to play the role of Savitri who stands not only for selflessness and sacrifice, but also for the indomitable will power with which she conquered death. So an Indian woman should symbolize the spirit of service, at the same time, should devote herself to uphold reason. A woman should never be a product of emotions but be a blend of reason, will power and love. Sona wants her daughter, Nisha to be like that.

Therefore, after her schooling, Nisha is brought back to share the family responsibilities and to look after the old grandmother. Nisha renders her contribution as per the needs of the family. Even though she returns after eleven years to her home, her activities at school and home are strange. She feels bored to stay long hours in the kitchen. She wants to fight against the notions of her mother who considers her daughter a mere helper in the kitchen. It is revealed when she says: “That Masi of yours has ruined your head. What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be
useful her entire life” (Kapur 126). The same opinion is expressed in Krupabai Sathianadhan’s novel, Suguna, which proclaims mother’s hindrance in her daughter’s education: “What a girl you are to go and trouble your head with books! What is the use of learning for a girl? A girl’s training school in near chool (the fire over which everything is cooked), and however learned a girl may be she must come to the chool” (21).

In her home, no body looks through Nisha’s school diary, note books or test papers. They didn’t care if she failed, they only cared if she cut gingeri. The whole family is against Nisha’s higher education. Rupa asserts that there is always time to learn cooking, but if one misses the chance to study, it will endanger the life of the girl. Rupa adds that education can make a woman independent. And an independent woman can manage any eventuality. So she concludes “It would be a shame to not educate her further, she continued in a careful, unemotional manner. Let her do English Honours, not too much work, reading story books” (Kapur 141).

As a result, her family decides to enroll her in an English Honours course at the college level at an interim measure. Nisha is sent to “simple, down-to-earth, no-nonsense girls’ college, where she would not get any ideas” (140), because “ideas make it difficult to adjust” (140). Nisha is permitted to do a course in English literature for mental relaxation. Nisha joins Durga Bai College. For eighteen years all that Nisha has heard is about domestic matters; all she has read is some Panchantra and Jataka takes when she was very young and after that her school text books. Now she is faced with Homer, the Bible, Plato, Chaucer, Milton and so on. Therefore, she prepares herself to think rebelliously “…of the girls in her class, girls with swishing, open hair, wavy, curly, blow-dried, or hanging straight, framing faces with fringes,
flicks, or stray tendrils” (Kapur 148). In spite of the austere upbringing, Nisha falls in love with Suresh, a student of Khalsa college of Engineering. They meet several times to confirm their love.

After meeting Suresh, Nisha becomes a bold girl. She wanders here and there. She roams around the university campus. She sips coffee in the coffee club with Suresh. On his suggestion, she cuts her hair like Suriya, a film star of the days. But she is quite certain that in a tradition loving family of hers, females keep long hair and she will have to face a storm at home if she cuts her hair. Suresh has been forcing her to choose between an outsider and her family, modernity and custom, independence and community. Therefore she prepares herself.

Nisha gives importance to love. She does not want to cherish family tradition. Hence she buries all family rituals. In her quest to establish her own identity, she becomes more adventurous in her clothing, alternating her salwar kamas with Jeans and T-shirts. In her appearance and temperament, she becomes a modern girl. Understanding fully of the idea of a modern marriage,

Nisha tossed her head. ‘I am not a fool’, she announced as she thought of the love that had driven her own parents to marry, of all the films she had seen, with myriad combinations of unequal background between boy and girl: rich-poor, Hindu - Muslim, Hindu -Christian, high class-low class, educated-uneducated. Love was the bridge over the great divide. Personal worth was all. The pure mind and the feelings of the heart. (149)

Nisha is against traditional family values. In contrast, her family does not approve all these. In Hindu epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata too we have
the concept of both arranged and love marriages. In India, it is often believed that arranged marriages are the most effective. However, due to literacy rate and education, the scenario has changed with regard to marriages. Independence, democracy, human rights, self-reliance, self respect, self assertion, economic freedom, employment, aptitude etc., have become the most significant factors for the changing scenario.

As an educated woman, Nisha believes in love marriage. At one point she asks Rupa Masi: “what do you think of love marriages? And she replies “They are very bad thing. Require “Too much adjustment” (196). As per the above statement many regard love as an uncontrollable and explosive emotion. It is blind to reality, reason and logic. As a modern woman, Nisha is proud of her own desires, aspirations and dreams about her married life. When the family talks and makes arrangement for Vijay’s marriage, Nisha feels that very soon that her marriage is going to be the talk of the time. Hence, she keeps thinking of her future.

…when she would marry. She would talk, laugh, sing, smile. There would be no need for her to be silent or demure, she was going to the home of her boyfriend (here she blushed for her own benefit) Hers would be a modern relationship. Gone were the days when women needed to be so silent. And anyway silence in itself was a subversive activity. (161)

Nisha’s love grew stronger and it gives her courage to be with Suresh in Vijay Nagar room. Whenever she meets Suresh, she remains as a modern girl with traditional values. In their clandestine moments, she maintains her distance by saying “We should wait till we are married.” (190), and also she remarks that “…if he was so
keen to do all this, why didn’t he make his parents talk to her parents, let the whole thing be clear” (192). In the subsequent months, Suresh forces her to agree to visit that room more often than her liking. In their privacy room “She would not allow Suresh to fully undress either her or himself, there was only so far his love could carry him. It is just as well there is something left for when we are married, agreed Suresh, making the best of a bad job” (192). Thus Nisha maintains her chastity and never let Suresh violate her chastity. So this firmness to stick to love marriage and at the same time safeguarding her morality is the choice that Nisha makes in the novel.

In the novel, *The Immigrant*, the protagonist, Nina, is a daring woman. By the standards of her society. She lives in a single room with her mother and she teaches English literature to lazy, recalcitrant and absconding students. The novel begins on her thirtieth birthday with a grim realization of her diminishing prospects of marriage. Her friends criticize her for wasting her youth. Nina’s mother talks about her daughter’s womb, her worries, her uterus and the unfertilized eggs that do not contribute to her womanhood. In such an atmosphere the question of being a female automatically rises in her mind.

Kapur has also probed into the psyche of Nina. As a spinster, Nina is feeling lonely and she is worried about her future life too.

Tomorrow thirty, thirty, thirty. What brightness could any dawn cast on her existence? Colleagues, friends, students, parent, her world was totally female. Would she end up a bitter old spinster like Miss Kapoor of the Economics department, like the Misses Hingorani and Rao of her own, like the Misses Hingorani and Rao of her own, like Miss Lal
of History or Miss Krishnamurthy of Sanskrit? Academics was full of
spinsters, minatory signposts to depressing, lonely futures. (3)

Her unmarried state is due to both compulsion and choice. There is an external
compulsion. She has to take care of her mother as she is the only daughter. Therefore,
in order to survive she chooses education. “Yet, education was a gift and she would
not exchange the life of the mind for any humdrum marriage” (3). So she does not
view marriage as the most significant thing in her life. Her unmarried state is
voluntary. It is a choice based on the negative impact of her love failure with a
professor by name Rahul, while doing her M.A. It is a secret relationship which is
being hidden from her mother. She loves him truly. “But Rahul had always made it
clear that he wanted to have his cake and eat it too. Like all cakes this one was
chewed, mashed into pulp and swallowed.” (6).

Rahul betrays her expectations with no commitment of marriage. Her self-
respect finally forces her to choose loneliness and silently she grieves over her
situation. She takes resort in reading dead authors. But Nina remains as the innocent
virgin to her mother. She dreams of her daughter that she will be married off some
day. The novelist contrasts the two emotions of the lonely women as:

Both of them were fated to lead lives devoid of men. The mother had
fallen through the bad karma of marrying a prince who would die
young. The only thing she had to look forward to was her daughter’s
marriage, after which she would suffer more loneliness. At least the
mother had hope. She had nothing. (7)
After Nina’s father’s death, she and her mother decide never again to believe in astrology, because horoscope has revealed his achievement, success and happiness. But it did not foresee his death

Like a king’s, pronounced his proud mother as he went from brilliant posting to brilliant posting, foregoing the initial years in the backwaters other IFS officers faced. Then, with no history of heart disease, a sudden cardiac arrest killed him at forty five. On and on his mother wailed, was early death too the fate of kings? (4)

Thus the father died leaving the family with nothing beholden to his people. The years of resentment eased only slightly when Nina finished school. After that Nina leaves her grandmother’s home. She takes her mother to Delhi and she goes to Miranda House. She loves Miranda House in Delhi, because it has given degree and a job. But her mother still harbours dreams of marrying off her daughter back into their rightful place in society. The plans are not going so well, because the mother refuses to indulge in any social life involved in spending Nina’s hard earned money. The daughter also refuses to agree to any advertisements which may bring either groom or acquaintances.

When Nina turns thirty, it makes her mother keep pestering her with marriage plans by seeking help from an astrologer after a long gap. The astrologer says the good news that the stars are set right for Nina after fifteen years of ill-luck indicating a journey far out of the country. When a proposal comes from an NRI named Ananda living in Canada, her mother prays that it would result in happiness at home and for her daughter. “To see her well settled was her only remaining wish” (61), because she has learnt from her own experience that it is absolutely necessary to have a man to
protect one from the vicissitudes of life. The offer of an arranged marriage from
Ananda, a dentist who has emigrated from New Delhi to Halifax, Nova Scotia, forces
her to make a decision. Her widowed mother’s desire to see her settled and her own
fear of becoming “the spinster of the English Department, her body dry with longing
for a child” (79), encourage her to make a leap into the unknown.

A woman’s prime function, as defined by our society is to serve as the vessel
that will bring forth the next generation. From her childhood, an Indian girl is taught
that she is born to marry, procreate and serve others mutely. Social institutions shape
her fit for these roles voluntarily, whether her family is poor or wealthy, whatever her
caste, class or religion may be. Nina in her isolated mood realizes that “We are
conditioned to think a woman’s fulfilment lies in birth and motherhood, just as we are
conditioned to feel failures if we don’t marry” (233). Finally she succumbs to
marriage with Ananda, a prospective groom.

He is an NRI dentist in Halifax. He belongs to solid middle-class stock of
India. His father wants him to be a doctor. However, as he did not get a good grade,
he was sent to dentistry the next best option. The plan goes well for a while. By
twenty four, he has his own practice and his parents keep looking for a suitable bride.
Life looked good until his parents died in an accident.

Consumed by grief, he loses all interest in ideas of marriage and happiness
until his emigrant uncle in Canada who is also a dentist persuades him to cross the
oceans, retrain in the west and make his fortune in a new land. Ananda while taking
practice as a dentist in Dehradun, never thought that he will leave India. He has no
clue about his future because
From the moment of his birth Ananda had been surrounded by the rituals of his caste. Before he left home, his parents did their best to reinforce the practices of a life time. He was a Brahmin, his body must never be polluted by dead flesh. Low caste boys in the college hostel might try and tempt him towards non-veg, cigarettes and alcohol. Should he deviate from the pure habits they had installed in him, his mother’s heart would break. (14)

Kapur describes the immigrant life experienced by Ananda. At Canada, he feels lonely. He starts thinking and comparing his life as an immigrant with that of his life in India. He asks his uncle “Where are all the people? (18). His uncle replies “They will come--once we enter the city. But don’t expect many--the whole country has barely 20 million-- and Halifax only 80,000. Now 80,001” (18). This gives him a strange feeling because he is used to the busy life of India.

He struggles to adapt to new ways of life. During the breakfast his uncle and his aunt Nancy teach him the western culture. In his uncle’s house he has to make the bed. He feels homesick and explains to his cousin Lenny “In India we had a maid who did all this, I mainly studied, explained Ananda in turn.” (21). On another occasion, when his uncle submits his application to the Dean of Admissions at the Dental school, he promises him to give 100 dollars a month. But Ananda as a typical Indian, wants to repay the debt. So he says: “I will pay you back uncle, he murmured.” (24).

His uncle Dr. Sharma forces him to become a cosmopolitan.

Look at me, Dr Sharma often said, pretending Ananda had a choice of where to place his gaze, look at me. I am a citizen of the world. In other words, every summer they went to Europe. In Rome, Florence,
Paris, Venice, London, Amsterdam, Munich, in art galleries, theatres and museums he exposed his family to the finest artefacts of western civilization. (26)

In India, Ananda with his parents ate special foods during festivals like Diwali and Holi and prayed before the Gods. But in Canada, he cannot feel the fervour and frenzy during such festivals. He wonders about his uncle’s participation in Diwali with his children and the small image of Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman on a raised dais. Dr. Sharma explains to him that “Twenty years ago there was no India club. I am one of the founding members. I realized that if I forgot everything of mine, then who was I? When the children came, it became even more important to keep in touch” (28).

Ananda performs well in the dental college and he begins to build a joint practice in Halifax with a college friend Gary, whose family more-or-less adopts him. As days pass by he starts to break all the taboos by drinking alcohol in the college and starts to eat non-veg by the advice of Gary that “When in Rome do as Romans do” (33). Ananda with the spirit of Gary’s idea, says that “The cows there are sacred, but may be I will commit no sin if I eat the cows here. Let’s see how long it takes me, he remarked and they laughed, wanting to encourage him in steps he took to be Canadian” (33-34). In this way Ananda is leaving the reminiscences of India quite behind and he is entering the new world after getting his degree. He has new jobs, new appointments and new duties. He also starts thinking about his marriage. But if he marries a local girl, he would be able to adjust himself. His uncle says:

If Ananda married a local girl, he would find himself in a difficult situation. When one came to a new country, one had to come
wholeheartedly otherwise one could be very miserable. He wasn’t
telling Ananda what to do, all he was saying was that the boy should
think about it. (36)

Ananda’s sister wants to get her brother a nice Indian bride. Meanwhile Gary
introduces him to Sue, who undergoes nurse training. He has his first sexual exploits
with her. But his sexual inadequacy disappoints Sue. This discourages him to have
any physical relationship with the Western woman. He feels depressed. He says that
he “who had never failed at anything was now failing in this most fundamental act, an
act which even the poorest, meanest, most deprived peasant in India performed with
ease (40).

Eventually Ananda loses Sue to Gary. They both get married. After that he
concentrates on his practice and emerges as a full-fledged specialist. He has a busy
schedule. However he thinks mournfully of his sexual difficulties and he expects that
in an arranged marriage, such things will not become a problem. A.J. Sebastian
comments that “His only consolation was the thought of marrying an Indian girl who
would understand and cope with his predicament” (28). That time, he gets a picture of
Nina with a marriage proposal from his sister. He feels good and with great
expectations he writes to Nina. She responds and the letter correspondence between
the two continues. Ananda’s sister goes to Delhi to fix their marriage. She is also
eager to escape the consequences of emergency in India which distresses her and she
is of the view that in India many people go abroad for better life.

Once introduced, the would-be couple embark on a long distance relationship
by air mail and phone. In the letter communication they share their observation. They
share about the political fighting. They discuss the struggle of the people in India.
Kapur sets the novel in the background of the final days of Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi. The novelist focuses on the frustration and the misery of millions including the intelligentsia who attempt to escape to the west seeking better prospects. The novelist also depicts the conditions of immigrants who are caught up between the two worlds. Ananda is striving to build his life as a practicing dentist with the feeling that

India had become a threatening place. A censored press, forced sterilizations, a factory that never took off, money laundering, kickbacks, torture with more and more in jail. Each detail became a brick in the edifice of Ananda’s love for Canada, the sanctuary. He determined to become a citizen as soon as he qualified. (Kapur 46-47)

Ananda is contented with his Indian choice. He is elated by her beauty and he proposes to take her out for dinner to Oberoi. They get ample time to discuss their future plans at Canada. As he drops her at home, he implants a kiss on her lips, sealing their proposal. That night Nina could not sleep. She is sure that he has come determined to marry. However, the novelist makes a pointed statement.

But she hadn’t felt the spark of instant attraction. Was that so necessary in marriage? He was decent, considerate, thoughtful, everything his letters had suggested. Perhaps, given time, he would grow on her. Together they would walk the path of slowly growing respect, mutual dependence, create the habits that tied people together like a tree and a vine. (71)

Her mother feels happy and finds the boy very appealing as she finds in him a replica of her husband with his dynamism. On the eve of his departure, Ananda
spends some intimate moments with Nina, leading to their sexual union. After he left, Nina begins to feel for her life faced with the problem of making her final decision. She grows sick of her indecision. If she does not give a positive response, she might regret it all her life. At the same time she feels diffident to confirm her feelings. Thus she keeps wavering that “Maybe she should just say yes. She wanted a family, she wanted children, she wanted to make her mother happy. And also she gets convinced that “Millions of women married for such reasons” (71).

Nina’s friend Zenobia, a divorcee, tells her that this could be her last chance. Zenobia also remarks that she has to remember that “... Where God shut the door, he always opened a window. Ananda was the window, if later he morphed into a closed door she could divorce him. Risks were inevitable if one wanted change” (74).

Her mother pressurizes her by telling that Marriage is a question of adjustment. Nina’s mother is very much worried about Zenobia’s influence over her daughter. Nina’s mother is aware of the fact that despite her parent’s efforts to ensure a respectable second marriage, Nina remains alone “thinking independence worth the pain of loneliness” (78). As well wishers both Zenobia and Nina’s mother convince Nina that if her marital life poses any difficulty, she could always go for divorce. She need not trouble herself. Now the ball is in the court of Nina. She has to decide. Kapur portrays her position “she should not resign straightaway, she should just take leave. All doors open, escape routes planned. Now jump off the fence. Go, Nina go” (79). Nina finally decides to marry. “The immigrant man needed a bride who would surround him with familiar traditions, habits and attitudes, whose reward was the prosperity of the west and a freedom often not available to her at home” (79). When she asserts to marry, Ananda feels relieved. He thinks that he could give up bothering
about sexual incompetency. Thus the dentist has turned to his own kind after seven long years. He hopes that “His wife would share his money, body and success” (79).

Ananda and Nina desire to have a court marriage as it is both inexpensive and less troublesome. Ananda is also adamant that the girl’s side be put to no expense. Nina’s fantasy at last comes to reality. Her mother hopes that “A bed of roses was waiting for Nina, Mrs Batra hoped the girl would not make aspecial effort to seek out the thorns” (82).

The bridal night surprises her, because her husband dispels her idea of a prolonged experience of consummation. He does not pay attention to her desire. Nina maintains her silence. Sex gratifies human relationship despite the differences in languages, race, culture, caste and nationality. It cements affinity. Nina is disappointed, for her husband does not fulfill her cravings. So there arises a breaking point in their relationship. However, she tries to suppress it with a positive thought of experiencing togetherness shortly. But thoughts of her past affairs with Rahul, her college Professor, keep propping up. Night after night the experience continued to be the same with no fulfillment, leading to added frustrations.

After Ananda goes to Canada, she awaits her visa to go to Canada. She longs to be with him, making Ananda feel more involved in love. After marriage, Nina goes back to her college ad experience the respect that comes with marriage “Nina Sharma, an accepted member of society, married, bound for the Western big time (101).

Within a month she gets passport, with hope of love, she starts her journey to Canada to start her happy married life.

A happy marriage demands total surrender and slavery of a woman. It is she who waits anxiously for the arrival of her husband with tears in her eyes. It is she who
has to prove her chastity again and again. But now the spirit of a modern emancipated woman has changed a lot. Shagun, the protagonist of the novel *Custody* is bold enough to choose an epicurean life style in order to create her own space in the world, fearing no one. She is a middle class woman. She is the wife of Raman, a corporate advertiser. She is the mother of two children too. Feeling bored, alienated and attracted towards modernity, she develops an extra marital affair despite being a traditional housewife.

Most of the women in India break their marriage bond, in order to obtain their missed freedom. A modern poet Taslima says about freedom as: “Freedom may be risky. It may have hazards but what joy is there in being caged even in the cage of gold! It is not security that makes. Life worth living, it is the flight into unknown, venturing into the untrodden paths and alleys of life” (5).

Thus to fly away from the routine life and to achieve her own freedom and joy, Shagun makes choice of another man in her life. The novelist gives paramount importance to the fears of the Indian mothers and she is of the opinion that marriage is important in every woman’s life. She puts it through the character of Shagun’s mother, who determines that “She had needed to ensure her daughter’s safety before the fruit was snatched and a tender life ruined” (Kapur 38). Since her teens, Shagun had an infinite number of suitable boys. As a student she was moderate and she did not like studying and though she did reasonably well in her exams, “She was looking forward to the freedom marriage would provide” (27). Her expectation becomes true, through the proposal from a decent family, from a bride groom named Raman IIT, an IIM graduate, a man who is a “sincere company worker, hard-working, ambitious,
obviously talented” (26). Her mother finds that “Raman was the antidote to every fear” (38).

The marriage of Raman and Shaguns was arranged along standard lines “…she the beauty, he the one with the brilliant prospects” (14). She becomes pregnant within a year and becomes the centre of all attention and she does her duties as wife and as dutiful daughter-in-law by producing a boy baby, “Her son had inherited her looks and colour, a further source of gratification” (16). But during her daughter’s birth, she becomes distraught because she was not mentally and physically prepared for a second delivery at the age of thirty.

However things get changed and she gives birth to a baby named Roohi who of course is a “carbon copy of her father” (18). Shagun before meeting Ashok, led a normal life as a mother of two children with a good earning husband. He is a kind of man who wants more challenge, more prestige and more salary in his life. After his daughter’s birth, Raman as a corporate adviser changes his company and works for the Brand which re-entered India. His new job income brings changes in their lives, celebrating “Weekends with family, friends, clubs and parties. Weekdays shopping, restaurants, children afternoon and evening, nights drinks and parties. From time to time a book was read and knowledge of it displayed” (17).

The distance between Shagun and Raman starts when he becomes busy with his job, that moves him up and down the country. But he compensates his absence by giving her an unlimited shopping allowance. But that entertainment does not satisfy her. She feels sick and tired of being alone. At that time, she is introduced to Ashok Khanna, the company wonder man, boss of Raman. After that meeting Shagun is attracted towards Ashok, which can be seen by her number of questions to Raman,
like “…was it true he was a marketing genius? Had he managed to produce results so far? Where was his wife? How come he wasn’t married? (11). By these questions Raman is surprised because Shagun is the kind of woman who shows only little interest in company matters. After a few days, she gets an opportunity to do modeling for Mango-oh. Despite her mother’s and her mother-in-law’s dissent, she accepts the invitation from Ashok. She appears as a mother in a thirty second film. In the shooting, Ashok invites her to his office to have coffee with him. Initially as a family woman, she hesitates; “Had he been a home-grown Indian and not the boss, she would have found a way to refuse, but this man had been imported from abroad and she did not want to seem unsophisticated (12).

So she accepts the invitation given by Ashok. She admires him and she feels sophisticated in his presence and enjoys to play the role away from home. Shagun and the protagonist Karuna in Shobhade’s Socialite Evening are similar in this regard. In Shobha De’s Socialite Evening, Karuna’s husband introduces Krish as a “great guy” (167). Karuna finds “a shy, sensitive, mixed up man whom she ‘instantly’ fell in love with” (168). Krish starts seducing her from his very first meeting by offering her a “Chameli gajra” (168). Like Raman, Karuna’s husband, however remains too simple to suspect his wife’s affair.

During the meeting with Ashok, Shagun perceives that in her eleven years of her marriage life, many men had looked, but none has ventured across the boundary line of matrimony. She realizes that she is unhappy, because “She had been brought up to marry, to be wife, mother and daughter-in-law. She had never questioned this destiny, it was the one pursued by everyone she knew” (Kapur 27). A man like Ashok
is an example of green-world lover. Within a few months of arriving in India, he
develops liking towards Shagun and feels that:

    …. he knew he had been destined for. In her colouring, her greenish
eyes and demeanour, she was a perfect blend of East and West. A
woman so pretty had to be married; besides, she had the look of
someone who never had to compete for male attention. To woo her
would thus be that much more difficult he must first create a need
before he could fulfill it. But he was used to creating needs, it was
what he did for a living. (4)

During another meeting she comes to know that Ashok is trying to seduce her.
“From then on, a curtain was drawn between her normal life and another Secret one,
more charged than anything she had previously known” (27). Shagun to kill her
boredom, decides to get turn her head from a dependable unexciting husband Raman
to the modern equivalent of the local mill-owner an executive in a global corporation.
Shoba de offers an identical situation in Socialite Evening where Karuna due to
tedium of life, seeks the company of Krish.

    A Woman could walk out of a perfectly secure marriage out of
boredom? Karuna the main protagonist, is not a bitch, if anything she
is far too sensible and controlled. But she’s one who recognizes her
marriage for what it is - empty. Her husband isn’t a wife-beater, a
drunkyard or a gambler. There isn’t any reason to leave him, yet that is
what she does. Lack of communication is a valid enough explanation
for her. She doesn’t justify her decision, point fingers or attribute
blame. (11)
To overcome the dull life, Shagun finds Ashok as a source of identity, enjoyment, communication and belongingness, which ultimately lead her to have affair with him. According to the psychologist,

An extramarital relationship may be just a casual one for fulfilling needs of sex or thrill.... or it may be a very intense, emotional bond. Usually, one would get into such a relationship one he or she has given up hope of getting. Something like love, sex, excitement, understanding, appreciation or respect in marriage” (Chugh)

Meanwhile, Raman finds that things are not right between Shagun and himself and he feels that “as though the centre of his world was hollow” (Kapur 31). He also feels that his wife has started rejecting him. And it is harder for him to forget the rejection he faced in bed every right. He feels: “You need two hands to clap, as his mother was fond of saying, two hands, and in this marriage he increasingly felt there was only one hand making its lone gestures” (50). To get rid of his suspicion he approaches detective agency to find his wife’s secret activity. In the conversation, she sharply replies “It is you who keep travelling. How can you talk about my distance?” (49).

It is true she realizes her irresponsibility’s. And at times she makes a thousand resolutions “be wife like, be good, docile, compliant but the mere sight of him sent these decisions out the window” (49- 50). She is not able to withstand that. Soon she overcomes such thoughts by making a call to Ashok : “It was very early, but she knew, day or night, he was always glad to hear her, no matter how sleepy, no matter how inconvenient. As far as he was concerned, her freedom was absolute” (50). Thus she feels at ease with Ashok which is absent in Raman. She senses that her husband
has begun to suspect her. Though she is so brave in the beginning, she becomes more fearful after his suspicion. In the fearful state, she rises her doubts to Ashok that if my children come to know about our decision “How will they like it when they grew up and realize their mother is a divorcée? (84). Ashok caresses her and says that “By the time your children grow up the whole world will have changed. Certainly this benighted country. Things are moving so fast as it is” (84). Here Ashok stresses about the narrow Indian set up society. He says that there is always a struggle between “Traditional versus modern values, individual versus society” (84).

Shagun compares her love with Princess Diana who left her husband and found happiness before she died. Ashok gives confidence through Diana’s life.

So much of her identity was bound up with being the Princess of Wales. But she didn’t care. She followed her heart. And you must follow yours. Something else will emerge if only you let it. In Diana’s case she started saying she was the people’s princess - you have to admire the repackaging that went into that. (85)

Manju Kapur has brilliantly given a global situation where the individual happiness is against the family, culture, society etc. Thus Shagun and Ashok find fulfillment in their adolescent love. Ashok goes to the extent of saying that “We only have one life to live and everybody wants to live it the best they can”(85).

Ashok wants Shagun all over his life, which is clear, when he whispers to Shagun as his “little wife” (113) and also he says “Because I want you with me for ever, not Just while I am in India (34). Shagun feels that she would do anything to pay heavily for this happy life given by Ashok. She wishes that she would find happiness that she never had it before. “If she were to die tomorrow, it would be as a
fulfilled woman” (113). She also says “If only I were not a mother, how easy it would be. To leave him, to live with you, just be happy” (87) with Ashok. She finds fault with Raman and “She blames Raman for her predicament, thinking of the years she had been satisfied with his lovemaking, tender, attentive, pedestrian, as so much wasted time”. (34-35).

Ashok feels that Shagun is more real to him than any woman he had known. “Why that was, he could not say, but she was his other half, the half he had been seeking all his adult life” (28). Another protagonist of the novel is Ishita who is the only daughter to her parents. She is a victim of wrong marriage but unlike Shagun she does not fall in love with any man. Rather she seeks her happiness by following the family values. Her educated parents provide her with good education and she is always reminded of the value of education. Thus Ishita at the age of twenty two says: “Marriage was far from Ishita’s thoughts. She knew it lay in her future but she wanted to work first. Having finished a BA, the family decided she should do a B.Ed., a degree that would always be useful” (52).

Ishita’s parents believe that if she gets a government school job, she would have a safe and a steady income. Here Kapur states that in India both family members and the younger generation begin to realize the importance of career for women. It is indicated through Ishita’s nuclear family. But the dreams of Ishita to become a career woman get shattered when an alliance comes from a traditional family with a proposal of a homely family-loving girl for their only son, Suryakanta. To them dowry is not a consideration because they have enough money they want. But a good home maker who is capable of giving grand children to be a good family is their concern. Ishita
detests this idea and thinks “What about her B.Ed., her desire to be independent?” (53).

Since her parents are from an orthodox family, they think that marriage will give a bright future for their daughter. Indian families mostly believe that marriage is considered as a ritual and a sacramental union. Marriage is an indispensable event of Hindu life and the person who is unmarried is considered as unholy. Thus Ishita’s parents persuade her by saying that a degrees will always be useful “For now, it was better to start on a good note. Stubbornness was not prized in daughters-in-law” (53). Ultimately Ishita who wishes to experience freedom, gradually accepts her parent’s choice. The marriage takes place. It is said: “The custom of arranged marriages seemed replete with wisdom, the institution of the joint family a safeguard against any loneliness” (Kapur 54) one might ever feel. Ishita in her in-laws home takes the responsibility of looking after her sisters-in-law by helping them in their homework, and by participating in their shopping. Her parents are satisfied about their successful completion of their life’s duties.

The new life brings to Ishita changes. Thus “Ishita had jumped a notch in the world. Car, address, situation-all better” (54). But this happy and blissful life becomes uneasy when there is no pregnancy after the passage of many months. Ishita’s mother wishes that the young couple can beget the children early in their relationship. The elders in the Indian family expect from the couple, grandchildren as a moral obligation. After the period of eighteen months in her in-law’s home: “They are beginning to ask, why haven’t you conceived?” (56).

Being afraid of her daughter’s future, Ishita’s mother redoubles her prayers by visiting the society temple morning and evening, with the offering of sweets, coconuts
and flower. One day, during her usual visit to temple, she listens to the shouting of the crowd which urged: “Hurry, hurry. Bhagwan is drinking milk?” (57). The news got spread that the God is drinking milk throughout Delhi. Her mother relates this incident with her daughter’s life: “And if the miraculous could occur all over the world, then why not in her daughter’s life?” (58). She believes that her daughter’s life also becomes happy like this miraculous happenings. To avoid the delay her mother-in-law in her turn, visits a doctor who says that they should wait for six months, before going in for tests. But the six months pass without any sign of a pregnancy. Before life becomes serious Ishita and her mother visit another fertility expert. The doctor asks many questions like, “Had she ever had an abortion? A miscarriage? Ever taken birth control pills? Or used internal devices? Ever experienced a major illness? Ever had TB? (59).

Ishita who is unaware of her illness answers no to all questions But her mother worries that her childhood disease, TB, is the reason for her infertility. Because of fear and to be on the safe side, her mother insists Ishita not to reveal to her husband about their visit to the doctor. Ishita without knowing the life of other side is fully immersed in her husband’s love.

She snaps her mother saying “What kind of lies do you want me to go on living? If I can’t trust my husband, it is no marriage” (61). She believes that her husband will never ignore her. Because whenever she cried, he used to console her by saying that “She was the queen of his heart, he would be without her, of course he would come with her to the doctor, of course they would explore all possibilities” (61). And also he gives positive views about life, by saying that every problem has a solution. Thus Ishita is fully mesmerized under the spell of her husband’s words as a
newly married woman, without considering her mother’s advice who is the true well-wisher. Thus as an enduring and obedient woman, Ishita prefers to be a good wife to her husband and wants to lead a good family life, which is opposite to Shagun who prefers to lead a free life from her wifely duties. The two women, Ishita and Shagun, thus differ in their choice. The present chapter illustrates the various reasons for the fictional characters to have their own choice and the forthcoming chapter would explicate the consequences of choice.