CHAPTER-IV

SEARCH FOR ‘SELF’ OF FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN SELECT NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

4.1 Preliminaries

Manju Kapur is one of the leading literary artists in India and a promising voice among women novelists in the vast galaxy of Indian literary tradition that has dabbled with the colorful vignettes of life on a vast canvas in all her four novels - *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home* and *Immigrant*. A self-proclaimed feminist, Kapur probes into the issues of women’s insignificant status in society and depicts their battle for their right to self-respect and dignity of living. Her thoughts seem to converge on the manner in which power equations operate amidst shared relationships in society and monitor their course and flow. She attributes their continuance to cultural construct whose principles and dictates are used to subvert the female existence in the façade of the male judgment. She denounces a culture that thrives on masculinity and critically examines the position of women as ineffectual angels in society. She strongly protests against the marginalization of women at the hands of patriarchal regimes and the subsequent diminution of her ‘self’ into dogmas of fixed subject-hood. Kapur’s literary creations spawn issues related to disappointments, sufferings and ordeals of women under the repressive forces of a closed society. Placing women at the locus in all her novels, Kapur delineates the lives of middle class women, their dreams and aspirations, their powerless state and their downsized position in Indian society.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to study two popular novels by the novelist viz. *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*. Both the novels are engaging stories of her women protagonists’ quest for creating a space of their
own in the large patriarchal dominion. For women who desire to free themselves from the overpowering presence of a male-dominating world, the battle is never easy. The present study is a humble effort to understand and sympathize with the sufferings and pains that become an inseparable part of a woman’s struggle for existence. This study endeavors to analyze the themes of the two novels and delve into the psyche of the characters-male and female. The study also focuses on the role of society, culture and tradition in shaping the lives of women and its impact on their freedom.

Manju Kapur attained popularity in the literary circles, the world over, for her debut novel *Difficult Daughters* that won her the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for Best First Book in the Eurasia section. Set against the historical backdrop of India’s partition, it ponders on the theme of feminist consciousness. The story revolves around the surge of freedom struggle in India and is based on the life of Kapur’s own mother. It is the saga of a young woman Virmati, who falls in love with a married man, a cause of disapproval in her narrow social circle. Kapur’s narrative presents a complete panorama of her protagonist’s fortitude and courage to stand up against the umpteen familial and societal pressures and her ability to seize her destiny and existence with the power of education and enlightened thinking. Replete with autobiographical element, the novel is a manifestation of profound renderings of the author’s life and times.

*Difficult Daughters* is an outcome of the novelists’ extensive research and dexterous writing of five years. Literature being a product of the real and unreal, the actual and the virtual, the external phenomenon and the internal turmoil of inner recesses in man and woman, serve as the basic food for thought for its creation or formulation. Pitted against the background of the nation’s freedom struggle and the heart-rending ‘Partition’, Kapur unfolds the story of Virmati with her dream of establishing her identity as an independent and educated woman. She yearns for a life that is distinctly marked with her own efforts of sustenance
achieved through education. However, in the journey of her emancipation she has to encounter several oppositions and face many trials and tribulations. It is thus, the story of the bloody battle of the country’s freedom and the feud that arises in Virmati’s life where she is made to oscillate between responsibility towards family and her love.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of ‘Difficult Daughters’

Manju Kapur is a feminist writer. She has always tried to portray her women rebelling against powerful challenges of tradition and patriarchy. The patriarchal society has carved out a definite image for a woman. According to it an ideal woman is one that loves, serves, sacrifices and suffers but above all she is one that silently obeys. Manju Kapur has tried to capture these vulnerable spaces of women within the Indian society. Her novels are vivid portrayals of conscientious women who desire to change their plight and proclaim their individuality by walking away from the social and traditional norms and the stereotypes of women. In doing so she occupies a prominent place in the category of gynocentric critics.

Eminent feminist Elaine Showalter defines ‘gynocriticism’ as:

In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begin at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture.

Manju Kapur’s novel Difficult Daughters deals with the condition of Indian women who are victimized and marginalized in a patriarchal framework of things. It is the story of a young woman torn between her family, her desire for education,
the lure of illicit love and its all encompassing political and communal connotations. It gives vent to the identity crisis faced by women and shows the protagonist’s firm conviction to live life on her own terms by confronting the numerous challenges of patriarchy.

_Difficult Daughters_ is a simple story narrated in an artistic style with a lasting appeal on human emotions. It is, at once a touching saga of ambition and struggle, love and lust, defiance and compromise. Virmati, the protagonist of the novel, falls in love with a neighbor, Professor Harish Chandra who is already married and has a family. Although after days of illicit relationship, the Professor finally marries her and gives her a place in his house as a co-wife to his first wife Ganga, life for Virmati wells up with endless miseries. The Professor distances her from her family on the pretext of encouraging her for further studies in Lahore. Virmati who is sensible and intelligent soon realizes that the price she has to pay for her fight for freedom involves enduring the pangs of separation which she has to face bravely by challenging the existing and accepted traditional norms of society. Virmati establishes her identity as an educated woman and as a wife through a self-conscious struggle.

Manju Kapur’s _Difficult Daughters_ is a powerful caricature of a society where shame gains prominence over grief, pragmatism moves hand in glove with superstition and a pregnant wife has to share a bed with her mother-in-law. The novel is spread over three generations of women and brings to light their utter sense of disillusionment. The three generations of women act as a metaphor for the three stages of Indian independence. While Kasturi, the mother represents the pre-independence period and is shown as a victim of the oppressive power of patriarchy, Virmati, the daughter represents the country’s struggle for independence- where she stands to rebel against the conventions of morality. Ida, Virmati’s daughter is the product of post-independence era and is independent in thought. _Difficult Daughters_ is about the struggles and anxieties of all the
daughters. It is not just about daughters but also mothers who are difficult to please. Simone de Beauvoir’s observation is most pertinent here. She says:

Sometimes she [the mother] tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate. What was good enough for me is good enough for you, I was brought up this way, you shall share my lot (533-34).

Kapur opens her novel with a startling revelation made by Virmati’s only daughter Ida-

“The one thing I wanted was not to be like my mother” (Difficult Daughters I)

These words echo a truth that keeps surfacing through the entire narrative. Ida moves away from being typecast as timorous and weak that is so characteristic of her mother Virmati. While her mother fails to propel her life’s journey in a manner favorable for her, Ida on her part is cautious not to get caught in any kind of entanglements. But the irony is that Ida too commits a mistake of getting into a relationship which soon turns sour and she ends up being divorced and childless. The plot of the novel is a complex one where there is the element of ‘peripeteia’ or reversal of fortune and ‘anagnorisis’ which means discovery or recognition. Ida is aware of the injustices done to her mother. When her mother Virmati was alive, she failed to have meaningful dialogue with her. Burdened with guilt after her mother’s death, Ida sets out on a journey to unearth her mother’s past and justify her struggle for search of an identity.

Kapur’s protagonist Virmati, the eldest of eleven children is born in Amritsar in a family of jewelers. She soon becomes a ‘second mother’ to her siblings and an attendant to her ever-pregnant mother Kasturi. She feels suffocated trying to satisfy the ever growing needs of her family and her ceaseless efforts to please everyone around her. She misses out on her childhood as all her time is spent in the role of a young mother to her brothers and sisters. Although she grows up to
believe that “marriage was her destiny” (62), her desire for education remains firm and she refuses to conform to traditional norms. On many occasions Virmati craves for love and affection from her mother, and yearns to be treated as special only to be disappointed because Kasturi, her mother sees in her a rival with the ability to topple her world—the world of patriarchy. Education seemed to be a powerful weapon for women to speak out their minds and express themselves. Meena Shirwadker observes,

As women received education they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their tradition—bound surroundings, resentment of male dominated ideas of morality and behavior problems at home and in place of work or in society—all come up in a welter of projection (201).

Virmati longs to break away from the clutches of tradition in search of an identity of her own and a meaning in life. She revolts against Kasturi, who like every mother desires to see her daughter marry and settle down in life. But when Virmati refuses to get engaged to Inderjeet, a canal engineer, the mother feels betrayed. Virmati, the rebel raises her voice against patriarchy that is symbolized by her mother Kasturi.

Virmati’s passion for education draws the Professor’s interest in her and he wants to have Virmati in his life not as his wife but as a woman to gratify his intellectual needs. But it is not just their common interest in intellectual pursuits but physical lust which overpowers them. When she finally marries the man she loves and starts living with his family, she is made to feel like an outsider, marginalized by her in-laws. Her relationship with the Professor strips her of her sense of identity completely. In abject humiliation as the second wife of the Professor, Virmati resolves to “walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had created out for her” (196).
Difficult Daughters is not Virmati’s story alone but that of several other women who cling to traditions in society and never make an attempt to break the chains of freedom from patriarchy. To this category belong our mothers and grandmothers who struggle to obey the dictates of the men who surround them and please them whatsoever. Manju Kapur effectively portrays the lives of such women who remain entrapped in the power structures of society and delineates their life full of sufferings and agonies. These women believe in traditional womanhood. There are also others with modern perceptions. And there is Virmati and her class of women who are neither traditional nor modern.

In this context Binod Mishra observes:

> However educated or innovative an Indian woman is, her Indian background and psyche cannot feel satisfied, unless society approves of her endeavors and her relationship. Virmati’s tragedy is the tragedy of ambition, obsession and un-acclaimed ovation.  

The protagonist of the novel is Virmati but in reality there are many difficult daughters in the novel. Some of them suffer mutely; some of them suffer and try to revolt; some succeed up to certain extent and some go on suffering; right from Kasturi to Ida and many others like Indumati, Gunvati and Vidyamati.

### 4.3 Female Characters in ‘Difficult Daughters’

Kapur has made her debut novel conspicuous with the overwhelming presence of women characters in it. The researcher will now take a peek at some of them and also understand Virmati’s predicament in the course of events.

#### 4.3.1 Virmati

> When I die I want no shor-shaar. I don’t want a chant, I don’t want an uthala and I want no one called, no one informed (1)
Difficult Daughters begins with the funeral of Virmati, the eldest daughter of Suraj Prakash and Kasturi from Amritsar. She belongs to a typical traditional family that holds on to conventional values and beliefs and upholds accomplishment in household duties as the most desired qualification for girls. Education for them loses its significance amidst orthodoxy and tradition. Virmati’s life is dotted with the act of selfless service right from her childhood for which she never earns a credit. She hopes to be valued when she is gone and strangely though for her, it is only after her death that she earns it. Even her daughter Ida is purposefully kept away from the details of her mother’s life and her past.

Virmati’s life can be charted out into three distinct phases. The first phase begins when she rebels against her family, the religious and political ideologies that impede her desire for liberty and identity. The urge for autonomous existence, unfortunately pinnfolds her in the Professor’s love. Although her relationship with Harish provides her an escape from a loveless traditional arranged marriage, it ends up being a furtive and painful affair with moments of togetherness only behind ‘curtained windows’. The second phase in Virmati’s life expresses her desire to unite with her mother whose love she betrays in order to escape her engagement with a man chosen by the family. Virmati fails in her attempt and sighs, “Will there be any change in my life. I wonder” (255). In the third phase Virmati resolves her crisis in the backdrop of the nation’s trial and makes up her mind to take a firm stand.

Virmati’s initial years are spent being mother-surrogate to her siblings. In spite of her keen interest in studies, she is forced to carry out her responsibilities as the eldest daughter and shoulder the burden of a second mother to her siblings in earnest. As a result she is unable to justify her studies and fails in F. A. Her childhood days are not spent in happiness. She longs for her mother’s love and attention but fails to get any. The readers are introduced to Virmati through her
sisters. Virmati shares a special bonding with her youngest sister Parvati. She spends her childhood as the most ignored child in the family.

Although Virmati with her desire for education doesn’t face any challenges during her childhood from the male quarters represented by her father, grandfather or uncle and her cousin, it is the women who pose as threats to her ambitions. Both her mother Kasturi and her aunt Lajwanti come across as voices of patriarchy and oppose her education.

**Virmati’s Days in Dalhousie**

As a result of incessant childbirths, Kasturi feels very weak and the doctor advises her change of place. Suraj Prakash hires a house in Dalhousie and moves there with Kasturi, Virmati and the baby girl, Parvati. Virmati who sees this as a chance to get special attention from her mother is disappointed once again by Kasturi’s harsh behavior towards her.

Virmati is highly impressed by her cousin Shakuntala and secretly wishes to follow her footsteps. Deeply inspired by Shakuntala’s charming and bold demeanor, she hopes to take her flight to freedom and be self-reliant like her. The seeds of desire for identity and freedom are sown and Virmati knows it can be made possible only through education. She looks forward to going to Lahore for higher studies someday.

**Virmati’s Marriage Proposal**

The thrust of Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* is on the theme of marriage. All parents consider that their prime responsibility is to get their daughters married and settled. Kasturi is a graduate herself and strictly maintains that marriage is the ultimate goal in any girl’s life. She is not pleased with Virmati’s idea to go to Lahore and pursue her studies and to be able to work like her cousin Shakuntala. The beautiful and charming Virmati with attractive features gets a marriage
proposal at the age of sixteen from a canal engineer, Inderjeet. Though Kasturi stalls the marriage for a while she intends to see Virmati married soon. The discussion that ensues between Kasturi and Virmati presents an interesting critique on education and marriage.

_In the juxtaposition of marriage and education, education is either described in terms of a threat, or portrayed as a dead end, reducing accomplished female characters to obedient wifehood and dependency rather than enabling them to make a living out of their training_ ⁶ (Alexander 275).

It is observed that all the girls in the novel share relational identity with the men. Virmati and her likes however, yearn to deviate from this traditional image of a daughter, mother or wife and create a space of their own. They believe that it is education alone that will emancipate them from their long term sufferings - both physical and psychological and help them in their exploration of their true identity. Virmati questions the oppressive voices and encounters them with indomitable courage. She is, according to Harit,

_A woman who stands for Triumph and must accept the ordeals of life with fortitude, playing a role with mild, gentle, smiling dispositions, forbearing the imminent authority of patriarchy by virtue of culture and also in terms of knowledge_ ⁷ (42).

Virmati’s yearning for education and her desire to be learned and cultured so that she may have a distinctive identity and not just be a mere wife or mother reeks of a rebellious nature in her. Her fight for independence annoys her mother and grandmother for whom the sole purpose of education is just to create awareness about the importance of adhering to rules, traditions and ideologies in life. Virmati’s adamancy in the matter spells disaster for Kasturi. Kapur seems to draw her reader’s attention to the India of the 1940s when it was almost a fad for
mothers to prefer early marriages for their daughters. But Virmati’s passion for higher learning gains intensity the day she meets her cousin Shakuntala who is a teacher. Like an enlightened woman, she craves to explore the outside world through education in Lahore College even if she must defy her mother who was so sure that “Virmati’s education was practically over” (106).

Virmati is engaged to Inderjeet, an engineer and a boy of her parents’ choice much against her wishes. Due to an unforeseen death in his family, the marriage is delayed. It is much around this time that she is entangled in a hopeless love with an Oxford educated and already married Professor who lives as a tenant in their house. As her marriage approaches, Virmati’s resolution to break off her engagement and marry the Professor is not only a shocking revelation for the family but also one that brings shame and disgrace.

**Society Versus Individuality/Virmati’s Dilemma**

Virmati is in love with the Professor, Harish Chandra. She is expected to marry Inderjeet who has waited for her for two years. Virmati’s infatuation for the Professor stems from her veneration for academics. She falls in love with him because the two are academically inclined. When she expresses her desire to study further and also refuses to carry on with her decision to marry Inderjeet, her mother is visibly annoyed and she slaps Virmati.

Harish loves Virmati and insists upon her to postpone or cancel her wedding. Virmati feels irked at the thought of her impending wedding. She experiences a great urge to call off her marriage with Inderjeet and marry Harish because she has already experienced male touch, intimacy and nearness in Harish’s company. Moreover, she is brought up with strict norms in a family that upholds ideals like morality, chastity and virginity as necessary virtues in an unmarried girl. In his article titled “Feminine Identity in India”, Sudhir Kakkar elaborates how Hindu myths have a significant influence on the female psyche and adds that stories and
legends about mythological women like Damyanti, Sita and Savitri “leave indelible traces in the identity formation of every Hindu woman” (57). Virmati is left hanging in the crossroads without being able to choose between her studies, a lover and an arranged marriage. She is highly confused and traumatized and unable to make a choice.

Kapur expresses Virmati’s mental tussle:

“But what could she wish? Early marriage and no education? No Professor and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased (54)

With no help from Harish in solving her problem, Virmati attempts suicide. Virmati’s impudence withdraws her family from forcing marriage upon her. However, she is locked up in a godown where she is made aware of her marginalized status. Kapur has, on several occasions in the novel, presented the conflict of “education versus marriage” (41) which points towards the changing scenario in the country which is on the verge of achieving independence. She also draws our attention to the impact of globalization and modernization on Indian society and culture that carried with it western ideals like free will and liberty. Kapur’s protagonist Virmati is unable to adjust to societal pressures of marriage thrust upon her. A ‘difficult daughter’ that she is, she does not relent easily. She is finally allowed to pursue her degree in BT from Lahore, “the Oxford of the East” (4).

The thrust of Feminists have been on the importance of women’s self-awareness as individuals. They emphasized upon woman’s ability to shape their own destiny and exert themselves through “feminist consciousness” or “consciousness rising.” Juliet Mitchell defines conscious rising as:
The process of transforming the hidden, individual fears of women into a shared awareness of the meaning of them as social problems, the release of anger, anxiety, the struggle for proclaiming the painful and transforming into the political’’ (61).

Traditional women in society are programmed to subordination and subjugation to men without demur, but those who are aware, rebel against the established norms and traditions so as to assert their identity and individuality. Virmati, who is sensitive and aware of her needs as an ‘individual’ rebels against tradition. She expresses her desire to be loved and not just assume the role of a responsible daughter that she has been ever since her childhood.

**Virmati’s Decision to End her Life**

The ongoing political turmoil in the country in the wake of its struggle for freedom gravitated in women a need to think and express their desires freely. It also manifested itself in the form of revolts and protests by women against fixed ideologies and practices that took a toll on their lives and psyche. When Virmati discloses her love for the married Professor, it is neither a matter of pride for her nor does it bring her a sense of security or completeness. Instead it brings shame and embarrassment to her family that has enjoyed great reputation in society. Unable to resist her feelings for the Professor, or find a proper solution to her emotional turmoil, she tries to end her life by jumping into a canal in Tarsikka. However, she is rescued by some servants working in her grandfather’s oil mill.

Stationed on the threshold of the nation’s independence, Virmati initiates her first step towards emancipation, without heeding to the pain and pitfalls that comes along with it. In the process, rather than being goaded by her mother, her efforts are ruthlessly condemned. Kasturi, the mother who is an embodiment of traditional values, acts as an impediment to Virmati’s assertiveness. As a consequence, Virmati has to endure gross neglect, humiliation and alienation by
her family. The uncanny relationship between the mother and the daughter can be understood from Simone de Beauvoir’s observations:

In the daughter, the mother does not hail a member of the superior caste; in her she seeks a double. She projects upon her daughter all the ambiguity of her relation with herself; and when, the otherness of this ‘alter ego’ manifests itself, the mother feels herself betrayed\(^{(533)}\)

Virmati’s refusal to marry a boy of her mother’s choice, invites her wrath. While Inderjeet’s marriage is now solemnized with Virmati’s sister Indumati who is rewarded sufficiently by her mother’s affection, the poor and frustrated Virmati is made captive by the mother in her own house. The shattered Virmati rues,

All I heard around me was talk of my marriage. If I was to be a rubber doll to move as they willed, then I didn’t want to live... (92)

Virmati’s miseries are aggravated by the news of pregnancy from Ganga, Professor Harish’s wife. Virmati feels cheated and beguiled by Harish. Agitated by her feelings of hopeless love, she brusquely cuts Harish saying, “you think you can do what you like so long as you go on saying you love” (110) and decides to move away from the hostile environment of her home and leaves for Lahore where she takes admission into BT.

**Virmati’s Life in Lahore: A Trapped Woman**

Virmati’s life in Lahore proves a welcome departure from the oppressive ambience of her home and family in Amritsar. She becomes aware of her life in the company of the learned and inspiring company of Swarnalata Anand. She decides to study hard until Professor Harish follows her there. She feels haunted by his presence and sweet talk when he says, “there is a void in my heart and in my home that you alone can fill” (112), and unable to resist his implorations, she succumbs to his charms which brings her further agony of an abortion.
“Loss of virginity pricks her conscience but then she overcomes the guilt by rationalizing it as outmoded morality” (114)

Most of the problems in Virmati’s life are sparked off from her irresolute behavior. One moment she is pained to keep away from the Professor and another moment she is seen rejecting him. Though at times, she has the temerity to rebel against social and familial demands, there are times when she falls prey to temptations. Caught in an untidy mesh of passion for the Professor, she demonstrates courage to spurn marriage, attempt suicide, face confinement, and suffer ostracism by her family.

**Virmati’s Presence in the Women Students’ Conference and her Remorse**

Virmati attends the Punjab Women Students’ Conference with her friend, Swarnalata in 1940. It is here that she meets women activists like Sita Rallia, Noor Ahmed, Mary Singh, Mohini Datta, Mrs. Mehta and Pheroz Shroff. She is surprised to see how passionate women are in their desire to acquire a space for themselves. Virmati is both impressed and enlightened by their invigorating speeches on the liberation of women.

Kapur’s protagonist is a victim of patriarchy that denies or deserts her freedom and desire to live a life of her choice. Although she rebels against all social and familial forces and is allowed to study further, it is observed that Virmati does not view the issue of education and a profession as means to acquire her individual freedom; rather as Veena Singh opines, “For Virmati herself, education is an escape...an escape from the reproaches of her family and from her mother’s silent disapproval” (165) She comes to Lahore to better her future by spreading out her wings like her roommate Swarnalata but ends up making her life chaotic and meaningless owing to her emotional involvement with the Professor.

On self-introspection, Virmati feels guilty and ashamed about wasting away her life in futile and meaningless pursuits in the company of the self-centered
Professor. Her initial resoluteness and tenacity to empower herself through education begins to fade away into insignificance as she vacillates between her desire for an identity and her weakness for Professor Harish.

She confesses helplessly:

...as for me, I know, I have failed in my duty and I will be punished one day. Nobody can escape from their Karma. May be what is happening to me is part of it, and there is no use protesting. (84-85)

She feels useless and wasted in comparison to the women activists who made their time fruitful by being politically active and organizing and participating in conferences worth appreciating. Feeling sick with remorse, she thought God is punishing her. She begins to feel out of place, an outcaste amongst all these women.

_Am I free...I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. Wasting it. Well, not wasting time, no, of course not, but then how come I never have a moment for anything else? Swarna does. She thought of Harish who loved her. She must be satisfied with that. These larger spaces were not for her. She felt an impostor sitting in the hall. (142)

Virmati urges Harish to be honest with her. She remembers her mother and Swarnalata’s words that men always took advantage of women and feels cheated as Harish keeps postponing their marriage. She wastes her time waiting for him in spite of being aware of the fact that she has been wronged by him. Feeling utterly dejected by his attitude, she accuses him:
I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace... and why? Because I am an idiot (149)

Virmati’s Pregnancy and Abortion

Virmati realizes that she is pregnant and feels certain that the news will compel Harish to marry her. When she learns that Harish is busy attending the Mundan ceremony of his newly born son in Kanpur, Virmati feels rejected and sad. She becomes conscious about the seriousness of the matter and with no help coming from Harish, decides to get the baby aborted with the help of Swarnalata and Miss Mohini Datta. Having realized her mistake, she makes up her mind to concentrate on her BT course.

Virmati’s New Role as the Principal of a Girls School in Nahan

Virmati receives an invitation to join a Girls’ School in Nahan as a Principal. The Prime Minister of Sirmaur meets Lala Diwan Chand and requests him to send Virmati to Nahan. She too accepts the offer and joins the Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya. For Virmati, this comes as a great opportunity to enjoy the fruits of education. She views her new role as a moment of true freedom and independence. It is rightly pointed out that, “Virmati does not know that love and autonomy cannot coexist. Love makes one vulnerable and vulnerability does not lead to autonomy” ⁴ (Swami 69). An egocentric person that he is, Harish follows Virmati to Nahan. He shares her house during his stay there giving rise to scandals which soon costs Virmati her prestigious job. Virmati’s identity as a respectable woman and a good daughter is put to test again.
Virmati’s Decision to go to Shantiniketan

Virmati loses everything she has - her family, her respect, her chances for marriage and her job of a Principal. At this juncture, she is left with only one option and that is social service for which she decides to go to Shantiniketan. Virmati has ruined her life and with Harish prolonging his decision to marry her, she thinks of seeking solace by joining the cause of social service. On her way, she decides to meet Harish’s friend, a Poet. The Poet arranges Virmati’s meeting with Harish and on her insistence they get married and return to Amritsar.

Virmati’s Alienation

Virmati lives under the illusion of leading a peaceful and happy life after her marriage with Harish. But it is not to be. Harish is reluctant to marry her and even when he does; it is only to gratify his intellectual needs. Virmati becomes a victim of antagonism for the whole family that spares no chance to humiliate and insult her. Even Giridhar, his son greets her as, “Who is this gandi (bad) lady? Send her away” (208). Virmati faces social ostracism as society disapproves of such an alliance. It is by all means Ganga, who enjoys the designated and dignified status of Harish’s wife. It is she who is assigned the responsibility to perform all the household chores of a dutiful wife viz. washing and mending his clothes, polishing his shoes, tidying up his desk, filling his fountain pens with ink, placing his records back in their jackets, hemming his dhotis, cooking, cleaning and serving snacks when his friends visited him. As a result, Virmati’s status in her husband’s house is that of an alienated woman. Kapur, very aptly voices the questions that perhaps hover in Virmati’s mind. She says:

And what about her? What kind of wife was she going to be if everything was to be done by Ganga? (216)

In a traditional society it is always the man who enjoys complete power and control over matters. In case of Harish too, it is observed that whatever the
situation, being the male, he is unaffected. Rather he gets to enjoy the best of both worlds. While Ganga serves him as a maid would, Virmati quenches his intellectual thirst. German Greer elaborates on the man-woman relationship by drawing an analogy between the employer and the employee. Referring to women as “life contracted unpaid workers” \(^{13}\) (329), she argues that women cannot dream of freedom “unless individual women agree to be outcasts, eccentrics, perverts and whatever the power that be chooses to call them” \(^{14}\) (328). Emphasizing upon their right to freedom she asserts, “To be emancipated from the helplessness and walk freely upon the earth-that is your birthright” \(^{15}\) (330).

Virmati’s life as the Professor’s wife is rid with agonies. When Virmati writes a letter to inform her family about her marriage and her arrival in Amritsar, she is deeply hurt by her family’s cold response. Finally one day she decides to make amends with her family and visits them. The unresponsive and unwelcome treatment she receives from her siblings to whom she was like a mother makes her aware of her transgression. She is able to sense a kind of palpable hostility in her blood relations. When she reaches her house and tries to enter through the backyard, not having the courage to use the front door, seeing her there her mother hurls harsh words at her:

\[\text{You’ve destroyed our family you badmaash! (...) You have blackened our face everywhere! For this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji! But what do you care, brazen that you are! (221)}\]

Virmati’s unrealistic hopes of uniting with her family are broken into smithereens. With all ties snapped off all too easily, what remains of Virmati is just her lacerated self. Virmati is a victimized and alienated not only as a suffering daughter but also as a humiliated wife. She feels withdrawn and goes into her shell.
Virmati’s Marginalization

Following her rejection by her mother and siblings to whom she was almost mother-surrogate, Virmati feels trapped living alongside Ganga as a co-wife. Virmati is stripped off her dignity and self-respect on account of an irrevocable mistake committed by her. Virmati’s tortuous life atones to the punishment imposed upon her by God for her sins and perhaps her wrongs done to Ganga. Though Virmati has been accorded the marital status of a wife, she fails to have peace of mind. Amidst an aggravated state of political turmoil in the nation and communal clashes in the country demanding for a separate Pakistan, her father Suraj Prakash is killed. When Virmati visits the house where she finds all her siblings seated around Kasturi, she feels like an outcaste as she is not allowed to join them. Kasturi accuses her of killing her father. The next day her grandfather, Lala Diwan Chand passes away. What surprises the readers in this whole gamut of affairs is the discrimination in the treatment for Harish and Virmati. While Harish is treated respectfully, all that is in store for Virmati is vilification and ignominy. Virmati is pushed to the periphery of her existence. Her identity is tarnished forever by her marriage with a married man and as Reena Mitra avers, “Unfortunately, however, the assertive and resolute Virmati never blossoms to the full” (78).

Virmati’s Pregnancy, Miscarriage and her Decision to Continue Higher Studies

Virmati’s bruised self has to endure much physical pain as a result of an abortion as an unwed mother and a miscarriage later as the Professors wife. Virmati goes into a state of depression following her miscarriage. To get out of her harrowing experiences in life that she has to undergo over the years, she renounces her marital home that she always yearned for and chooses the precincts of a classroom. She returns to Lahore to pursue an M.A. in Philosophy.
After her marriage, Virmati is symbolically cast out of her mother’s house and forced to find her own way. Her punishing exile ends only when the massacres of partition make her family’s continuing rejection untenable. It is a sign of Virmati’s marginality17 (Boehmer 57).

Virmati - The ‘New Woman’

Kapur’s debut novel Difficult Daughters revolves around its protagonist Virmati. Virmati is representative of innumerable women who raise their voice for equal opportunities, equal access to education and display the courage to break the norms and conventions in society. However, Virmati and the likes are also victims of double colonization. Placed at the heart of the narrative, Virmati is oppressed by both colonialism and patriarchy. But she is “strong to bear the pain silently, without anyone knowing” (101). Virmati is seen to defy patriarchal norms that tie her down to domesticity. She firmly asserts her individuality and aspires to have an identity of own. In doing so, she burgeons into a New Woman. She remains steadfast with her choice of husband and does not give in to familial or societal pressures in marriage. She grows to be a woman having firm conviction and looks forward to making her life meaningful through education. She is seen spending time in the company of the Professor’s friends. Harish finds a true companion in Virmati. She represents the first generation of women who are educated, aware and are struggling for their own space in the male dominated society. Though her journey towards the New Woman is dotted with problems and perils, she never gives up her efforts to establish her own identity. However, in crossing one patriarchal threshold Virmati is trapped into another. The free-spirited Virmati is made captive in her husband’s house. She is excluded from the activities of the kitchen that is considered as every wife’s domain and confined to her bedroom. Under such circumstances, all Virmati does is “adjust, compromise and adapt”18 (Malik 135).
Virmati’s Resentment towards Kasturi

Kasturi and Virmati share a mother-daughter relationship. Though Virmati the eldest of eleven children almost plays a mother to her siblings and shoulders the responsibility of the house, unfortunately, she fails to win her mother’s love or attention. Kasturi’s repeated pregnancies make her feel weak and exhausted and it is Virmati who has to manage the affairs of the household. Conceding to the demands of the situation, Kasturi, unwillingly yields to her daughter as a result of which she feels threatened. Virmati now dons the role of a ‘substitute’ instead of remaining her mother’s ‘double’. This leads to their relationship gaining hostile dimensions. It is true that the relationship between a mother and her daughter is a delicate one. It is a subtle bond that blossoms in the presence of both separation and union. Kasturi’s inability to sympathize with her daughter’s needs and restlessness, forces her to believe in the corrupting influence of education. She wonders, “Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster.” (11). Virmati defies Kasturi whose voice is synonymous with patriarchy and as a result faces alienation. Visibly disappointed, she says, “Why was anything to her mother so difficult? May be it was best to keep silent” (11). Kasturi is not concerned with the freedom that Virmati is craving for. Since she identifies herself with her daughter, she sees her desire for independence as a selfish act of rebellion. Taking into consideration the fact that the daughter is an alter-ego of the mother, Virmati’s rebellion is a rebellion against the mother’s ‘self’. Manju Kapur has delineated this relationship very vividly in all its shades such as anger, bitterness, dislike, contempt, envy and resentment.

With passage of time, and many upheavals in her life, Virmati completes her M A in Lahore. The nation’s call for partition leads to communal clashes and plenty of bloodshed. Amidst this widespread suffering, Kasturi calls Virmati back home. Although she feels happy on being accepted back by her mother and her family, she is grieved that her father and grandfather did not live to see the reconciliation.
But Virmati is relieved that Kasturi has forgiven her and there is no more resentment between them. Soon Virmati gives birth to Ida and the family settles down in Delhi.

The most difficult daughter in *Difficult Daughters* is Virmati. She suffers right from the beginning of the story and her agonies seem to continue till the end. Even after her death people talk badly about her. She is the victim of societal, religious and patriarchal norms. Virmati leads a life full of harrowing experiences. Her tragedy is the tragedy of ambition, obsession and un-acclaimed ovation. All through the journey of life it is happiness she seeks. Sadly though, happiness evades her every time. Though education made women aware of their rights, there was very little that they could change. Virmati’s story is thus the saga of struggle and sufferings of millions of daughters in the world and India in particular.

4.3.2 Kasturi

Kasturi is Virmati’s mother. She is the daughter-in-law of Lala Diwan Chand. She is born in Sultanpur and shifts to Amritsar after her marriage with Suraj Prakash. She is a mother of eleven children: six daughters and five sons. Incessant pregnancies and child births have drained her of her energy. She feels very tired and exhausted. She feels sad, disappointed and helpless and blames nature for it. She says, “*How trapped could nature make a woman!*” (7)

In a traditional Indian male-dominated society, a woman is perceived as an epitome of sacrifice, suffering, submissiveness, tolerance and endurance. These are the traits which are used as a yardstick to decide her virtuosity and define her status of being a ‘woman’. Kasturi represents the mothers, grandmothers and women of her generation that uphold these ideals and accept their subservience to the males. In doing so, they support the patriarchal ideals. Though patriarchy is condemned heavily, a fact that cannot be overlooked is that women by their silent submission to the societal norms perpetuate patriarchy. Kasturi in Manju Kapur’s
Difficult Daughters, with her strong adherence to the ideals and conformist’s stance, stands firm as the voice of patriarchy. This is evident from her contempt for her daughter Virmati’s rebellious nature and defiant attitude.

Kasturi like most Indian women refuses to change and is, as Uma observes:

... inculturated with the ideas of martyrdom, of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status through the mythical models of Sita, Savitri, Gandhari, etc. Following these models, she is taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person, pure and faithful as a wife, and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother.  

Thus, Kasturi is a perfect instance of feminine attitude in Kapur’s novel. Her philosophy of life rests in her idea of procreation which according to her is at the crux of happiness and life. She considers marriage as a form of deliverance and resigns herself to carrying out the duties of an ideal home-maker. She sees no reason to rebel at all.

Kasturi’s Perception of Education

Kasturi is educated at the Arya Samaj School by her father, Lala Jiwan Das, an established businessman and an Arya Samaj activist who is strictly committed to education for girls. Kasturi remembers learning to read, write, balance household accounts and sew- the qualities needed to be an accomplished woman. With a strong conviction that marriage is the ultimate destiny for girls, she is highly contemptuous of education as having corrupting influence on young minds. She envisages her daughter Virmati’s life as a perfect wife and a perfect mother. Married at the age of seventeen, she devoted all her time in cooking and prayers. Expressing her annoyance on the idea of higher studies for girls and commenting on the unmarried status of Shakuntala she says, “A woman’s shaan is her home”
She remains unperturbed by Virmati’s failure in inter and is quite happy at the thought of seeing her married soon.

Kasturi is a very simple woman who enjoys her ignorance. She is happy with the circumstances and floats like a wood on water in the river. She does not oppose or revolt against anything and accepts life as it comes. Kasturi is guileless and very friendly with Ganga and the Professor’s family.

**Kasturi an Ideal Daughter, Wife, Daughter-in-Law and Mother**

Kasturi grows up to be an ideal daughter to her parents. During her formal training in school she learns all the skills necessary to make a good wife and an ideal daughter-in-law. While at school she is fully loaded with the ideologies of Arya Samaj and the idea of marriage being the ideal goal for women. Speaking about Kasturi, her uncle remarks, “Once she {has} gained a proper education, she would be on her way to becoming one of the finest flowers of Hindu womanhood (62). She was an obedient daughter to her mother unlike her own daughter Virmati. Kasturi is a traditional woman who, trapped in perpetual motherhood, suffers silently.

Kasturi’s personality is the kind that understands the limitations of her gender. She blindly accepts the way of life lead by her mother-in-law Kishori Devi and other women of her generation. Her predicament is vividly reflected in her mother-in-law, Kishori Devi’s words:

> In this life we can do nothing but our duty. Serve our elders, look after our children, walk along the path that has been marked for us and not pine and yearn for those things we cannot have. Since our destiny is predetermined, that is the only way we can know any peace. Duty is our guide and our strength. How can we control the things outside us? We can only control ourselves (194).
Bound by tradition, and unmindful of their personal wants or desires, they sacrifice themselves to healthy upkeep of their families guarding its values and expect their children to follow the beaten track. Unwittingly they perpetuate the patriarchal ideals and exercise their control over their own daughters, albeit within the family domain.

**Kasturi’s Helplessness**

Kasturi is shocked when the Professor’s wife informs her about Virmati’s decision of going to Tarsikka to commit suicide. Disappointed by Virmati’s reckless and disgraceful behavior she accuses her of spoiling the future of her sisters. Her only wish in life is to see her daughters married and settled. She attributes Virmati’s wayward actions to the evil effects of education on her psyche. Her motherly love and care is evident from her unsuccessful efforts to protect Virmati from the influence of the self-centered Professor. Helpless and defeated, she turns resentful towards Virmati’s defiance of social and familial norms.

**Kasturi’s Reconciliation with Virmati**

The changing political scenario in the country is the cause for widespread violence and bloodshed, killings and rape. Kasturi is anxious about her daughter’s safety and asks Virmati to return to Amritsar and live with them. Kasturi forgives her daughter and welcomes her back into the family. A traditional daughter, wife, mother and daughter-in-law, she is aware of her sense of duties and responsibilities towards her family which she carries out with utmost care. Unlike her daughter, she accepts marriage as the ultimate goal of a woman’s life and happily devotes herself to it. Kasturi has no desire for freedom and resigns herself to the accepted norms of society.
4.3.3 Shakuntala

Eldest daughter of Chandar Prakash and Lajwanti, Shakuntala has an M.Sc. in Chemistry from Lahore Government College. She is introduced as the most highly qualified girl in Lala Diwan Chand’s family, and is yet to be married. She is intelligent and has her priorities of life in place. By virtue of her education she is able to resist the family’s pressure for her marriage thereby removing all obstacles from her desire for freedom of self. Her mother Lajwanti abides by similar principles like Virmati’s mother Kasturi. Both the women are tied down by strong patriarchal ideals and value-systems. Instead of feeling proud of Shakuntala’s achievements, her family is continually worried and anxious about her chances of marriage. Right from the time she visits her aunt Kasturi in Dalhousie, Virmati considers Shakuntala as her ideal and longs to be able to step into her shoes one day.

Shakuntala’s happens to be the image of a modern woman. She is seen to follow a liberated lifestyle. She rides horses, smokes, plays cards and badminton, acts without her mother’s advice, and buys whatever she wants without considering it as a waste of money. In other words, she never seems to question or doubt herself. Having tasted the wine of freedom she advises Virmati to look for happiness outside one’s home and not inside. “Times are changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?” (110) Shakuntala succeeds in breaking the popular traditional belief of marriage being the destiny of every girl. She stands out among all the women characters in Kapur’s Difficult Daughters by her determination to establish her identity through education for, she settles down in her profession as the Principal of one of the colleges in Delhi.
4.3.4 Swarnalata

Swarnalata Anand is Virmati’s roommate in her B T Course in Lahore. Virmati is greatly influenced by her strong feminine space. Swarnalata is a freedom fighter. A sorted woman with specific goals and ambitions in life she compels Virmati to introspect. Virmati is impressed by her strength of conviction and the courage she displays in her duty towards the noble cause of the nation. Swarnalata is portrayed as a woman with clarity of thought and action. She is a vibrant woman and one of the strong female characters in the novel who is self-willed and free from the patriarchal notions in society. Swarnalata stands up to the cause of education for women. Displaying indomitable courage she threatens her parents that if she isn’t allowed to continue her education, she will take active part in demonstrations against government and land up in jail. Although a woman, she fits in with ease in a male arena of action. A social activist she shuns dependency and believes in a life beyond home and marriage. Manju Kapur portrays Swarnalata as a woman with deep sense of understanding, someone who is committed to certain political ideals in life.

Swarnalata as a Good Friend

Swarnalata is a good friend of Virmati. She always inspires her and makes her see the world from a different perspective. She takes good care of Virmati during her illness. She helps Virmati in her difficult times. When she learns about Virmati’s pregnancy, she does not blame her or sermonize. She arranges for a Dai with the help of Miss Mohini Datta and helps her to abort the child. She is the most faithful and helpful friend Virmati has.

Swarnalata - A Leader and a Feminist

Manju Kapur introduces Swarnalata towards the end of the novel. She is a political activist and is seen to play active role in the nation’s independence struggle.
Youngest among the organizers, she makes a fervent speech at the Punjab Woman Students’ Conference that leaves an indelible impression on Virmati’s mind. Virmati is overawed by her sharp intellect and clear-cut objectives in life. She aspires to reach such spaces someday. A feminist herself, Swarnalata often advises Virmati on the importance and need for meaningful existence:

*Marriage is not the only thing in life Viru. The war, the Satyagraha movement, because of all these things women are coming out of their houses - taking jobs fighting, going to jail-wake up from your stale dream* (151).

Swarnalata’s persona is a complete departure from the women trapped in patriarchal traditions and ideologies. A highly educated woman, she is not the kind that believes in husband worship. She has strong beliefs on gender equality and sticks to them even after her marriage.

### 4.3.5 Ganga - The Professor’s Wife

Ganga is the prototype of the traditional image of women in a patriarchal society. She is uneducated but married to a learned man, Professor Harish Chandra. A simple and innocent woman, Ganga seeks happiness and satisfaction in pleasing her husband. Like every other traditional housewife, her interest lies in cooking, embroidery and knitting. She suffers humiliation at the hands of her husband who doesn’t consider her fit to be his companion. Harish feels embarrassed in her company and prefers not to expose her before his friends because she has no knowledge of music or literature.

Ganga on her part has completely surrendered her existence in gratifying the needs of the Professor. She is very particular about his likes and dislikes. She has already given up her individual personality and molded herself just to suit his style. She accepts everything that comes to her without any argument. Passivity is deeply ingrained in her personality. She belongs to the category of housewives who
believe in giving happiness to her family at the cost of her own. Ganga has no identity at all. Her self-centered husband has accorded her the status of a maid who looks after all his needs from cooking to cleaning.

Ganga’s life takes a miserable turn when she learns about her husband’s love for Virmati. She feels helpless and humiliated. In fact it is Ganga who suffers the most in the novel. She has to endure and live with her husband’s illicit affair with Virmati initially, and later accept her as his wife. Though Ganga is aware of her husband’s frequent visits to Lahore, she can do nothing but pray to save her children and family from evil influences.

Ganga earns the sympathy of all the characters in the novel. Her mother in law, Kishori Devi considers her as an ideal daughter in law. Kasturi also respects her a lot and feels sad for her destiny. Though Harish doesn’t hate her, he certainly deprives her of the dignity and respect she deserves from him.

Ganga is a mute sufferer. She is the victim of the social and cultural system. A simple woman without a vision in life, Ganga repents for not having given importance to education. Ganga is pure at heart and absolutely guileless. Though she fails in her efforts to win her husband’s love and attention, yet she does not hate him.

4.3.6 Lajwanti

Lajwanti is married to Lala Diwan Chand’s son Chandar Prakash. She has two children: Somnath and Shakuntala. She is vexed with her sister-in-law Kasturi’s incessant pregnancies. Lajwanti is an envious woman and her envy for Kasturi is based on her fear for not getting a good share in Lala Diwan Chand’s property. Right from the time Suraj Prakash brings home his bride Kasturi, Lajwanti finds her in-laws dance in attendance and fuss over her health. Seeing Kasturi steal the limelight Lajwanti taunts her child births as harvest time.
4.3.7 Kishori Devi

Kishori Devi is Professor Harish Chandra’s mother who comes to live with her son in Amritsar. She has another son and two daughters who are settled in Kanpur. She is a very traditional and simple woman. She is very kind and nice to her daughter in law Ganga and is found to support her always.

Kishori Devi disapproves of Harish’s relation with Virmati. She is worried about her son. When Harish marries Virmati and comes to Amritsar, in spite of being annoyed with her son, she accepts his marriage and makes arrangements to welcome her new daughter in law. She is a considerate woman who suggests going back to Kanpur to save Harish from additional burden. She does not discriminate between her daughters-in-law. She takes good care of Virmati when she learns that she is pregnant. She asks Virmati to sleep in her room and reads out lines from the Bhagwad Geeta.

Kishori Devi represents the women from the first generation who are not aware of their rights and have accepted their secondary status in the society.

4.3.8 Ida

Ida is the main character in Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters. Ida is educated and modern. She is a divorced, childless woman who wants to explore her mother Virmati’s past. Ida tries not to be like her mother and in doing so she confirms the vital position of Virmati. Ida in her search for her mother’s past emphasizes upon Virmati’s concrete position in the novel. Ida not only examines the dualism of centre and periphery, positive and negative but also reconstructs the story of her mother’s life through her flight of imagination:
In searching for a woman I could know, I have pieced together material from memories that were muddled, partial and contradictory. The places I visited, the stuff I read tantalized me with fragments that I knew...did. All through, I felt the excitement of discovery, the pleasure of fitting narratives into a discernible inheritance (258)

Ida expresses her impatience at her mother’s weaknesses. She displays strong strains of feminism in her personality. When her Parvati Masi describes her mother as a simple girl at heart, Ida retorts, “I hate the word ‘simple’. Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways” (207).

The name Ida was given to her by her father. Ida means the ‘new beginning’. Actually her mother wanted to name her Bharati but Harish did not approve of it. Though the name sounded like a Persian word, but she was happy with it. He felt his daughter’s story will be different. But it was the same as all difficult daughters.

Ida is married to Prabhakar who is a successful academic, a writer of books, a connoisseur of culture, a disseminator of knowledge. He was like her father in many ways. Virmati is pleased to know that Ida’s husband is a very nice and respectable man. But in reality, only Ida knew what her agonies were. She was devastated when Prabhakar forced her into aborting their child. Ida was in a state of shock and depression. She realized that Prabhakar did not love her. After her abortion, she did not conceive again and this incident happened to create irreparable cracks in her marriage.

Ida began to feel lonely, disillusioned and like an outcaste. To cure her feelings she decided to correct her mother’s past. By doing so she felt she will achieve peace of mind and thus began her journey to explore the life of so many difficult daughters.

Ida is portrayed as a very strong, committed and optimistic woman. She is the narrator of the story of Difficult Daughters. She is disappointed with her mother
who is so carried away in passion that she fails to see things in the right perspective. Ida is of the opinion that her mother not only ignores her filial duty but also becomes a victimizer by usurping the place of Harish’s wife that actually belongs to Ganga. Her selfish act causes a setback to the much-needed feeling of sisterhood among women. Ida rejects Virmati not as a mother but as a woman which is evident in the concluding lines of the novel:

This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not hunt me anymore. (258)

4.3.9 Kiran

She is one of the minor characters in the novel and represents the next generation as Ida. We meet her in Lahore where Virmati is pursuing her M. A. course. Kiran is shown as a girl with a revolutionary spirit. When her father who is a member of the Azad Hind Sena, is arrested in the Red Fort, Kiran joins the demonstrations. Though she is beaten up severely and is bleeding profusely, she does not give up her struggle. Kiran is like a son to her parents and makes them very proud.

4.3.10 Lala Diwan Chand’s Sister

Manju Kapur introduces yet another difficult daughter to her readers in Lala Diwan Chand’s sister. She is a child widow who lives with her brother. She is respected a lot by all the family members but her personal life is a tragedy. Before she could understand what life is and what marriage is, she was married and before meeting her husband she becomes a widow.

She turns towards spirituality and spends her time listening to religious discourses. Kasturi and Lajwanti respect her a lot. She symbolizes the evils of child marriage prevalent in Indian society in those times.
4.3.11 Parvati

Parvati is Virmati’s youngest sister. Virmati has a special bonding with her. Virmati was almost a second mother to her and Paro too was very fond of her. Virmati sought her little sister Paro’s help in passing her letters to Harish. Parvati appears visibly disturbed when Virmati is locked up in the godown and not allowed to attend their sister Indumati’s wedding. Paro keeps on asking Kasturi about Virmati. She is pained to see her suffer as a result of the punishment imposed on her by Kasturi. It is strange how women suffer from agonies even as children. Paro is too young to understand the cause of Virmati’s punishment and realize the significance of morals that is used to label a person as ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

Parvati is almost bruised when her sister Virmati is denied entry into their house after her marriage with the Professor. Also, she cannot bear to see her mother kicking Virmati and hurling abuses at her when she tries entering the house through the backdoor. Virmati reconciles with meeting Paro on her way to school. Unfortunately, because of Kasturi’s scolding even these brief pleasurable instances of meeting her little sister Paro has to be aborted. We meet Parvati again at the end of the novel. She has grown up to be very short tempered. She does not like Virmati’s daughter Ida digging information about her dead mother. She asks Ida to forget the incidents of the past because the past hurts her.

4.4 Male Characters in ‘Difficult Daughters’

Difficult Daughters is rife with the story of agony and sufferings of all the daughters. As a result, the male characters have little room in Manju Kapur’s narrative. Yet the writer has justified these characters. There are a host of male characters in the novel. They belong to different generations. Lala Diwan Chand and Lala Jiwan Das represent the first generation where as in the second generation we have Surya Prakash and Chander Prakash; Professor Harish
Chandra, Syed Husain, Kailashnath, Somnath, Indarjit all, belong to the third generation; and lastly we meet Prabhakar. All these men are bound by tradition and culture. However best they try to set things in their proper order, there exists something deeper that they can never ever change.

Lala Diwan Chand is a rich businessman from Amritsar who owns a jewelry shop and an oil mill. An active member of the Arya Samaj, he has remained committed to education for girls. He wished all his daughters in law to be educated. He even started a school for girls in their area. He allows all his grandsons and granddaughters to seek the benefits of education. The fruits of his efforts are seen when Shakuntala completes her M.Sc. and Virmati completes her B.T course from Lahore. He is a staunch follower of the Arya Samaj rules and tries to take a few progressive steps towards the betterment of women.

Lala Jiwan Das is Katuri’s father. He is open-minded and doesn’t object to Suraj Prakash having a word with Kasturi when he goes to meet her as his prospective bride. He is quite progressive in his approach. He encourages his daughter to graduate from Arya Samaj School and later sees her married when she is seventeen years old.

The second generation is represented by Harish Chandra and Prof Syed Husain. They are the men of new generation who are educated abroad. Having seen the world, their approach towards life too is different. Harish condemns the practice of child marriage of which he has been a victim himself. His marriage with the uneducated Ganga at the tender age of twelve is a total failure. Soon after his marriage he is sent to London for higher education. He is grossly disappointed with a companion like Ganga for she is not fit to match his academic interests. He narrates his pathetic condition to Virmati:
Then Vir, consider, what is that takes me away from the woman I live with? Apart from the planets in the house of marriage, of course! She is a good woman, runs the house to perfection, and looks after my family as though they are her own. Despite this, I am lonely, lonely, lonely. We have nothing in common. I once wanted to share my interests with my wife, felt her pain at my estrangement from her. But she will not change. Will not- cannot- I do not know who is responsible for this state of affairs? Society, which deems that their sons should be educated, but not their daughters. Society that decides that children- babies really- should be married at the age of two and three as we were. As a result, both of us needlessly suffer for no fault of ours... (103)

Kapur introduces her readers to Prof. Syed Husain at Anarkalli in Lahore. He too is a man of new generation. He is divorced and has a lady friend. He helps the Professor meet Virmati in Lahore. He reminds Harish about their happy days at Oxford. Both these men want to change the social inequalities but they cannot find a way out. The rules of a second marriage are different for Harish and different for Virmati. Society easily accepts Harish. Even Virmati’s family welcomes him as their eldest son in law but when it comes to Virmati; she is deserted by her mother and the entire clan. Virmati is considered dead for them.

The novelist provides us brief glimpses of the characters of Somnath and Kailashnath. Somnath is Virmati’s cousin. Unhappy with his family business, he chooses to prepare for civil service exams or a career in law. Being educated, he has a liberal outlook. He spends a lot of money on the construction of his house. He also represents the same social trend where he does not consider it worth consulting his mother before taking decision of letting the house on rent. He simply comes and declares it to Lajwanti that a tenant will come to live in their house. During the political upheaval in the country, Somnath loses his life in the communal clashes.
Kailashnath is very cooperative and helpful to Virmati. He does not seem to oppose her and his role in the story is pretty minor. He takes Ida to her father’s college at Lahore. He helps her and shares information about her parents in details. Prabhakar belongs to the last generation in the novel. With passage of time, though positive changes in the society are imperative, any improvement in the status of women whatsoever continues to remain an illusion. Prabhakar is Ida’s husband. Virmati and others are fond of him but it is Ida who knows the real agony of her marriage. On Prabhakar’s insistence she aborts their child and ends up in utter loneliness. Finally Ida is divorced, childless and lonely in life.

Thus, Manju Kapur strikes a perfect balance in her delineation of all the characters in the novel.

4.5 Portrayal of ‘Self’ of Female Protagonists in ‘Difficult Daughters’

*Difficult Daughters* is a feminist discourse in which Manju Kapur has tried to present the turmoil of a woman who tries to cross the social, familial and cultural boundaries in order to forge an identity of her ‘self’. It is natural for every human being to perceive identity as an asset. While some people acquire it by birth there are others who spend a lifetime trying to establish one’s identity. In India being born as a son itself is an identity. This is where Manju Kapur unravels the stories of injustice meted out to the women characters in the novel. All through their lives they are seen searching for their self and trying hard to get rid of the social and cultural tags of womanhood. But their quest mostly ends up in futility. Strange though it may appear but the life of Kasturi, Virmati and Ida—each one representing a different generation is much the same. There is no change in the fate of women. Kapur also tries to say that no matter how educated or aware a woman is, she still needs the sanction of society and culture of which she happens to be an integral part for endorsement of her efforts and her relationships.
Virmati is deprived of maternal love and familial affection and this creates a void in her life. Slightest encouragement from the Professor makes her reciprocate her feelings for him. However, there is a dichotomy in her character which remains unresolved. If on one hand she is strong-willed and determined to break free from oppressive forces, both social and familial, then on the other, she goes weak in her knees when it comes to resisting the temptations to stay away from the Professor. The underlying cause for her weakness is perhaps her need for love and identity which she misses the most.

Kapur’s novel is not just about the rebellion of daughters. It is not only the daughters who are difficult to please but also the mothers. It is the mothers who burden their daughters with unreasonable demands thus stunting their growth as individuals. In this context Simone de Beauvoir points out:

> Most women simultaneously demand and detest their feminine condition, they live through in a state of resentment- vexed at having produced a woman, and the mother greets her with this ambiguous curse: “you shall be a woman”. She hopes to compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double and she... Sometimes she tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate: “what was good for me is good enough for you, I was brought up this way, you shall share my lot”²⁰ (533-34).

In a traditional Indian society daughters are never allowed to enjoy similar status as that of the sons. A daughter has to fit into a frame that has its own pre-decided and well-defined specifications. Daughters, unlike sons are expected to be docile, shy dutiful, meek and simple. They are expected to please everyone and conform to the norms of patriarchy. Anyone who dares to defy is labeled as rebellious, willful and self-centered. Betty Friedan accuses society for viewing the problem of identity as a male prerogative and expresses her displeasure over why women are
told that “truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights, the independence and opportunities”\textsuperscript{21} (13).

Kapur’s protagonist Virmati gathers strength of will and determination to deviate from the traditional norms and explore her place in society but her efforts is mercilessly quashed by the ruthless guardians of patriarchy. Her quest to earn selfhood and identity for herself is an arduous journey. The scars inflicted on her womanhood cannot be healed easily. Yet, in spite of her failures Virmati certainly stands out as a representative of her class that is struggling for the quintessential space which she can call her own. To sum up, Kapur’s Virmati is no ordinary woman and this can be aptly explained in the words of Gur Pyari Jandial:

\textit{To devalue her would be a mistake, for what mattered was to have made the attempt. For Virmati, to have tried to break the patriarchal mould in the forties was a great achievement} \textsuperscript{22} (4).
4.6 Search for ‘Self’ of Female Protagonists in *A Married Woman*

Women’s position in society, down the ages has been determined by the role she plays in the family which is conditioned by tradition and patriarchy. She is trained to subjugate herself to the male preponderancy, and in the process completely abnegate her ‘self’, her rights and the fact that she is human. However, for modern Indian women novelists in English, mythical characters like Sita, Savitri, Damyanti or Gandhari appear as surreal prototypes to model their women upon. Although, they do not wish to sound insolent and reject the ideals, yet they feel it is difficult to replicate these images of ideal womanhood. The protagonists of these writers resist and revolt against the norms and value-systems in society which fracture, displace, alienate and stunt their efforts in realization of their selfhood. In their journey towards exploration of their ‘self’, they desire to break free from all the barriers that chain them down to domesticity.

Kapur’s second novel *A Married Woman* (2003) is the story of her protagonist Astha who dares to defy the institution of marriage in her search for ‘self’.

4.7 Thematic Analysis of ‘*A Married Woman*’

*A Married Woman* unfolds the tragic tale of its protagonist Astha. Astha is, as the title suggests, a married woman and Kapur tries to demystify the age-old concept of ‘marriage’ through the turmoil in Astha’s marital life. Kapur takes a peek into the spurting unrest in Astha’s mind against the backdrop of communal unrest in India in the wake of Hindu-Muslim conflict over sacred ground in Ayodhya. Astha seeks to rebel and protest against her secondary status in an otherwise happy marriage, by her involvement in the external world. This gives rise to a discordant note in her marital life. It is through Astha that Kapur attempts to lay bare the harsh realities, the losses, the deceit and the traps, the depression and the dangers
associated with the conflict. The basis of the conflict is best explained through the experience as woman and the experience as people. With the help of the personal private lives of her characters, Kapur deftly represents the prevailing tensions and the oscillation of the self between two states of the mind and in doing so she offers her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness of her protagonist.

The title of Kapur’s novel speaks volumes. Her decision to use the indefinite article ‘A’ in the title underlines the fact that A Married Woman is not the story of her protagonist Astha alone but of every married woman in some way or the other. The novel ponders upon the predicament of all married women who seem to lose their identity and individuality in the rigmarole of their daily affairs. Kapur reflects upon the humdrum existence of such women who have always expressed a longing desire for their own private space amidst the male bastion that autogenously seek to exercise control over their women.

As a result of the disharmony, disillusionment, suppression and injustice that most women undergo in their marriage, they sometime seek weird ways of escape from their anguish. It seems most natural for them to depend on other women akin to their sufferings and pain in order to seek solace and comfort and establish themselves as women, or individuals in their own right. Lesbianism is one such means of escapades from male domination. Manju Kapur like some of the other recent women novelists has defied the idea of discussion and description of sex being a taboo subject and its confinement to the male domain in literary writings.

4.8 Female Characters in ‘A Married Woman’

Kapur’s novel revolves around Astha, her protagonist. The entire narrative is woven intricately with numerous incidents in the life of Astha as the ‘married woman’. However, Pipeelika is the other female character who adds a surprising and unexpected twist to the story and together they take the novel forward in an
interesting direction. Astha’s mother Sita, Mrs. Trivedi, and Astha’s sister-in-law fill in as minor characters in the novel.

The study now seeks to analyze the protagonist of the novel - Astha’s life and journey as a married woman.

4.8.1 Astha

Manju Kapur opens her novel with an arresting statement- “Asth was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear” (A Married Woman 1). These words are reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir’s historic proclamation that a ‘woman’ is not born but eventually she becomes one. Astha is born in a middle class family bound by traditional values. She is the sensitive daughter of an educated and modern father and an orthodox mother. She is raised by a mother who relies upon strict values and ideals as laid down by patriarchy. While Astha’s mother “believed in the old ways” (2), her father “believed in the new” (2). Astha’s father maintained that her future lay in her own hands and that it could be strengthened by reading good number of books. Her father knew that “with good job comes independence” (4). But Astha, who failed to ignore her teen aches and desires, was “well trained on a diet of mushy novels and thoughts of marriage. She was prey to inchoate longings, desired almost every boy she saw” (8).

As a young girl, Astha has her bouts of adolescent love for Bunty first and later Rohan. Dalliance between Astha and Bunty blossoms to such an extent that makes her mother feels that her daughter would “really be gone in the arms of Bunty” (12). But Sita’s vigil upon her teen-aged daughter prevents Astha from getting carried away in amorous thoughts. Under Sita’s prying gaze, Astha’s liaison with Bunty is aborted. Her involvement with Rohan, the second man in her life, is slightly mature during which she maintains that indulgence in physical exploration is uncalled for before marriage. Astha’s stance in this matter ascertains her
upbringing in a family ingrained in good morals and noble virtues. But again, not wanting to be called “un-hep”, and annoy Rohan, she gives into his demands. During a drive together, her body becomes exhilarated by Rohan’s physical touch. “She had never been so aware of her body’s separate life before” (24). Astha contemplates marrying Rohan but is shattered when she comes to know about his decision to go to Oxford. Astha is shocked and feels cheated because Rohan does not ever disclose his plans to her. It is interesting to note here that marriage is just a part of life for a boy whereas in case of a girl it is the goal of life. All other aspects such as education, career, ambition, seem to fade in the face of marriage. In fact, Manju Kapur subscribes to the views of Simone de Beauvoir who says:

> We open factories, the offices and the facilities to women but we continue to hold that marriage is for her the most honorable career freeing her from the need of any other participation in the collective life ²⁴ (167).

Both Virmati (Difficult Daughters) and Astha’s mother share similar views about marriage. Astha’s mother like Kasturi is often heard telling her daughter:

> When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the shastra’s say if parents die without getting their daughter’s married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth?” (1)

While Astha is busy trying to nurse her bruises from her broken affair her family receives a marriage proposal from an educated and well settled boy called Hemant Vader. Astha also feels blessed with the alliance and after a brief courtship settles down in marriage with Hemant.

**Asthā’s Marriage and her Role as a Traditional Wife**

As it happens with girls from all traditional and decent families Astha is married to a USA returned engineer Hemant Vader, the son of a bureaucrat from Delhi. Amidst all the celebration, the heat of June and the claustrophobic environment,
Astha “realized this was the beginning of the life ordained for her” (37). Astha’s life is brimming with joy in the early days of marriage because “she was now a home-maker in her own right, a grown woman...” (37) She often wonders about her life with Hemant, his love and attention and considers herself fortunate. “I haven’t really lived, thought Astha, till now I did not know what life was all about” (46). However, the poetry in her marriage soon begins to lose its charm. Hemant on his part is happy that his wife is a virgin.

The role of a traditional wife is loaded with the burden of responsibilities. Her work is unending and she doesn’t even get paid for it rendering it a thankless affair. The wife is expected to serve selflessly without expecting to be rewarded ever. Moreover, all through her mundane and monotonous routine she can hardly spare time for her own aspirations and desires. Her life is spent in pleasing her husband and family with little or no attention to herself. The ancient Hindu law-giver, Manu whose philosophy occupies a significant place in the pursuance of Indian ideology and culture emphasizes on the subservience and subjugation of women. Asserting his views on her perpetual dependence over the male, he avers:

In childhood, must a female be dependent on her father; in youth on her husband; her lord being dead, on her sons, if she has no sons, on the near kinsmen of her husband; if she be left no kinsmen, on those of her father, if she has no paternal kinsmen, on the sovereign; a woman must never seek independence25 (Manusmriti V, 148)

During her early years of marriage, Astha’s world also is confined to her role as a loving wife and a dutiful daughter-in-law. Kapur’s heroines whether Virmati or Astha accept their passive existence and discharge their domestic duties earnestly and without any complaints.
Back in Delhi, Astha submerged herself in the role of daughter-in-law and wife. The time spent in the kitchen experimenting with new dishes was the time spent in the service of love and marriage. Hemant’s clothes she treated with reverence...with her mother-in-law she visited and shopped in the mornings, the memory of the night past, and the expectation of the night to come insulating her from any tedium she might otherwise have felt (43).

Asthya is soon confronted with the monotony, dreariness and loneliness in her marriage. She now begins to spend long hours waiting for her husband to come home. The unending leisure hours make her feel restless and bored. Thus it takes just a few months for her to wake up to the realities of the dull and drab life she leads.

_Asthya’s desire receded. She felt cold, dreary and distanced from him. She had been waiting for him all day, thinking of their being together, but nothing of this was reciprocated. He was a criminal destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness. Her subservient position struck her. She had no business kneeling, taking off his shoes, pulling off his socks, feeling ecstatic about the smell of his feet (50)._ 

**Loneliness and Boredom in Astha’s Marriage**

With passage of time, Astha becomes more and more aware of the boredom that surrounds her life. Hemant’s escalating passion for business deprives her of his company. To suppress her growing sense of apathy that begins to make her feel asphyxiated she takes to sketching and writing- a passion she nurtured during her days as a young girl. Her poems and paintings act as possible media to give vent to her pain and anguish. Sympathizing with her protagonist the novelist rues:
She wrote about gardens and flowers, the silent dark faces of gardener standing plants and never getting credit. She wrote about love, rejection, desire and longing. The language was oblique but it was her own experience endlessly replayed (79).

Her teaching job alongside, filled in her vacant hours with gainful engagement. Her in-laws perceive her job as a nice way to pass her time and Hemant too never takes her job seriously. Their views regarding Astha’s job as a teacher reeks of snobbish ideals of patriarchy that doesn’t value a woman’s career. Manju Kapur focuses on multiple feminine issues in her novel. While demystifying the traditional notions about marriage she also analyses the dynamics of man and wife relationships. Apparently Kapur’s heroines do not perceive marriage merely as a union on a physical plane but beyond that into emotional and mental levels too. Marriage often turns into a trap, a reason for torment and oppression which is more than often traumatizing. Women are often used and exploited by men as objects of gratification. Their ‘self’ is trampled upon and their existence then becomes as good as that of a slave. Beauvoir’s opinion is worthy of mention here. She says, “loyalty and friendship to exist between man-woman, the essential condition is that they should be free in relation to each other and be equal on concrete matters” (488). Referring to her insignificant position as Hemant’s wife Astha rues, “a willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth” (231) are the essential prerequisites of a married woman.

As time progresses, Astha senses a change in Hemant’s attitude towards her. His disinterestedness in her achievements and his overpowering and demanding attitude renders Astha devoid of pleasures in her marriage. Hemant looks condescendingly at her job, doesn’t appreciate her poems or paintings which fetch her huge amounts. He gives the aching Astha “gold but not a kindly word” (56). Hemant’s romantic encounters become the cause of her frequent headaches as the married woman in Astha goes to mollify the marauder.
A斯塔 begins to grow familiar with the ‘other’ aspects of his nature. Her journey in the novel is reminiscent of Henrik Ibsen’s Nora in *The Doll’s House*. As a result of duality in the behavior of their husbands Hemant and Helmer, both Astha and Nora are haunted by questions about their identity. Astha reconciles to the idea of prolonged dependence, arguments and the problems that ensue from the typical male attitude of domination which reminds the researcher of Srinivas Iyengar’s observation, “*What is astounding is the woman’s power of patient endurance, her inexhaustible capacity for love, and her simple tenderness*” 27 (446). Although in the sense of a woman Astha is weak, yet, she emerges a strong individual continually endeavoring to forge ahead of her mundane life.

**A斯塔’s Reprieve in Motherhood**

It is the birth of their daughter Anuradha that pulls her out of her monotony as she soaks herself in the pleasures of voluntary motherhood. With the little Anuradha, Astha, the mother shares an eternal bond. She feels a sense of self-realization in the mother-child relationship which is strengthened by love rather than being just a moral obligation. Anuradha’s arrival in her life is a reprieve for Astha amidst the grueling discontentment of her marriage. Astha cherishes the sense of responsibility of a mother towards her daughter until the apprehension of the second child which Hemant insists is going to be a baby boy brings in restlessness in her life. Unwilling to give up, she says:

*It is not in our hands, at least not in mine. It is the man’s chromosome that decides the sex, and with two sisters in your family, it may be a girl. I have read about these things (61).*

The arrival of the baby boy is a grand celebration for it has fulfilled the need of an heir in the family. Manju Kapur seems to awaken her readers to the unchanging principles and ideals of patriarchy which has not lost its sheen with modernization. Further on, Hemant’s attitude towards his business gaining precedence over
Asth’a’s teaching job is yet another instance of male chauvinism in society. Hemant, the USA returned husband who initially has no qualms about the gender of his first born suddenly turns a ‘typical’ husband with his claim that it is a man’s prerogative to provide for the family and a woman’s to rear her children. Astha now assumes the role of a single mother. Fraught with the pressures of a job, home and family, she plans of giving up her job. Astha’s life thus gradually transitions from the loving baby daughter to adolescence, to a dutiful wife and womanhood, to motherhood and perhaps experiences of a new life which is completely alien to her.

**Asth’a’s Economic Freedom**

Hemant’s lack of interest in Astha’s achievements is a blow to her self-respect. Hemant neither cares for her job as a teacher nor does he have the heart to appreciate her talent. It is his business that gains prominence over Astha’s talent and earnings. Added to this is her pain at having no claims over matters related to finance in the family. Manju Kapur traces several instances in Astha’s life when her economic freedom is curtailed by the dominating Hemant. When her mother Sita sells her flat after the death of her father, she hands over the money to Hemant without even mentioning it to her. Astha is appalled by her mother’s insensitivity towards her own daughter. Astha receives yet another jolt when Hemant funds their trip to Goa with Astha’s earnings without her knowledge. Even more strange is Hemant’s act of installing a dish many times costlier than the unique silver box that Astha desired to buy but was outrightly refused. Astha is hurt that Hemant could entertain his children’s demand but not oblige his wife even once. Kapur, the feminist cries out:
She (Asthा) was an earning woman, why couldn’t she have a say in how some of their money was spent? She never said anything when he chose to squander money on airline tickets, why couldn’t she buy a box she liked? (165)

Women all over the world and especially in India are perceived as inferior entities, be it in matters of family, money, choices and decision making where their opinion is never sought. Astha feels helpless when after the death of her father, she desires to let her mother stay with her under the same roof but Hemant disapproves of her idea. Astha is hit hard by the discrimination that society makes between the privileges enjoyed by a daughter and a son. Again Astha is deeply hurt when her mother donates her husband’s book without consulting her. She is shocked when her mother discloses that Hemant refused to accept the books because there was no room in ‘his’ house. Astha hit back furiously, “Then who am I? The tenant” (87). Virginia Woolf’s assertion on the importance of that special private space of a woman in its metaphorical sense holds true in Astha’s case too. She has no say whatsoever in the matters of life solely because she is inferior to the man in her life.

Asthा: The ‘New Woman’

Manju Kapur proceeds to focus on the void that Astha experiences in life in spite of all the material comforts she has for herself. The novelist takes a peek into the mind of her protagonist and gives her readers glimpses of the image of a ‘New Woman’ taking shape in her. “Somewhere along the way Hemant’s Astha changed. She told herself it was only slightly, but it oppressed her”. (66) The demands of her marriage, motherhood and her job as a teacher soon begin to take a toll on Astha. The idea of quitting her job makes her aware of her financial independence which has possibly given her freedom from social conventions, and she shudders at the thought of losing it. She realizes,
“...between her marriage and the birth of her children, she too had changed from being a woman who only wanted love, to a woman who valued independence” (72).

As days pass, Astha’s marriage begins to lose its charm. With Hemant’s pre-occupation in bringing in more money for the family and thoughts of his business Astha’s loneliness begins to escalate. She no longer gets to enjoy the love and companionship of her children when she gets home from work. And perpetual neglect by her husband forces her to contemplate on the meaning of her marriage. Astha begins to drift into depression as a result of feeling of alienated and marginalized. Thus as a married woman Astha turns into an enduring wife. Michael Foucoualt, the French critic rightly points out:

*Power relations are dependent upon a number of deftly-designed strategies: most important role of these strategies is the tendency on the part of the dominant to ceaselessly refuse to acknowledge the dominated subject’s separate identity and the dominant power structures constantly strive to drive a wedge between the oppressed or about to be oppressed individual and community group, gender or class to which she belongs. The victimization of woman can be seen as related to a larger exploitative pattern perpetuated by patriarchy*²⁸ (125).

Torn between her desire for freedom and her sense of duty and responsibility, Astha is not sure of what was right for her. She desperately wants to wriggle out of the image of an ideal wife and an ideal mother. Not being able to think alike and live together on equal emotional and psychological plane, she is many times tempted to break her marriage. She wonders if pain and women are synonymous with each other.

Kapur profoundly voices her anxiety over the predicament of women in India in a long speech given by Astha:
In essence women all over the world are the same, we belong to families, we are affected by what affects our husbands, fathers, brothers and children. In history many things are not clear, the same thing that is right for one person is wrong for another, and it is difficult to decide our path of action (197).

Setting out in her quest for identity and freedom, Astha takes part in political demonstrations during which she meets Aijaz, a theatre personality who recognizes the talent which had lain dormant in her. One gets to see a gradual transformation in Astha’s personality when she becomes assertive in matters of conjugal sex. Displaying lack of interest in the act she says, “... Do I have to give it just because you are my husband? Unless I feel close to you I can’t - I’m not a sex object, you have others for that”. (224). Marriage is not merely for sex but a bond of togetherness on a mental, emotional and psychological plane.

Asth’a meetings with Aijaz, the theatre artiste, creates an interest in her to seek a new relationship. Her heart brimming with admiration for him, she is surprised to find that he has given rise to longings in her. Enamored by him as a man of mission, she is shocked and shattered by the news of his tragic death in a communal clash during the Babri Masjid incident. Eventually Astha’s search for love drags her into lesbianism. In her relationship with Pipee, Aijaz’s widow, Astha regains all that she had lost after marriage- her rights, dignity, self-respect, happiness, freedom and identity. She is no longer a subaltern ‘other’ but an individual who could assert her rights - a New Woman. Kapur’s Astha and Ibsen’s Nora do not care for the tags of wife, mother or daughter anymore.

4.8.2 Pipeelika

Kapur introduces Pipeelika in the second half of the novel. She is the eldest daughter of JyotinTrivedi and Mrs. Trivedi. Having lost her father, she lives with her mother in Bangalore. She is associated with an NGO, which works for
education of underprivileged boys and girls. She is a very bold and active woman. She holds a B. A. in sociology from Miranda House and later completes her M. A. from the Delhi School of Economics. Pipee works in Delhi where she happens to meet Aijaz during a conference. They spend time talking for hours and gradually they fall in love.

**Pipeelika’s Decision to Marry a Muslim**

Pipee is a woman of the New Age. Her decision to marry Aijaz, a Muslim is revolutionary. Though she is aware of the resistance she will have to face from her family, she remains firm in her choice. Her mother is shocked to hear her decision to marry a Muslim but Astha tries to convince her mother, “*He is intelligent, sensitive, socially committed, a history lecturer, a theatre activist....*” (118) Kapur’s Pipee is a liberated woman who does not like to lead a fettered life. She and Aijaz meet often and a sexual relationship burgeons between the two. When Aijaz accompanies Pipee to Bangalore to meet her mother, Mrs. Trivedi is quite impressed by her daughter’s choice and gives consent to their marriage.

**Pipeelika’s Married Life**

Pipeelika is a modern woman with independent earnings. She starts her married life with Aijaz in her new flat. The newly wedded couple share liberal views. Aijaz becomes aware of Pipees’s sexual orientation during one of their conversations on their honeymoon.

Kapur describes the inner turmoil of Aijaz on learning about his wife’s “*first love*” who happens to be a seventeen year old “*school girl*” (129)
Aijaz felt silent. Pipee was so unlike her usual self that he didn’t know what to think...Did she think he was narrow-minded enough to disapprove of a schoolgirl crush, he who knew of the strong ties that existed between women in the zenana? He reached for her hand. “Don’t feel sad, Pip. I am here. After all this is our honeymoon.” (129)

Pipee is innately homosexual and by marrying Aijaz she chooses to be a heterosexual. Kapur delineates Pipee’s mind:

Pipee smiled at him and thought there were some things that could not be shared, no matter how understanding the other person. All said and done she was lucky to have found him. So many of her acquaintances were still struggling, looking for love and companionship, rejecting arranged marriages, only to experience series of heartbreaks on their own (129-30).

Pipee is an Indian woman who hails from a conservative Hindu family. She considers herself fortunate to have married Aijaz, a Muslim because lesbianism would be much more harshly criticized than marrying a Muslim. Pipee thus makes a compromise as far as her choice of partner is concerned. Pipeelika leads a fulfilling life after her marriage with her being assimilated into Aijaz’s family in Shahejahanpur until she loses Aijaz in a tragic incident.

Pipeelika’s Intimate Relation with Astha

Pipeelika and Astha meet in Ayodhya. Astha is a member of the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch. She visits Ayodhya to deliver a speech where she comes across Pipee. Ever since then, Astha’s life takes a volatile turn. The novelist gives an unexpected twist to her story through the friendship that grows between Pipee and Astha. She consciously sows the seeds of lesbian love between them to advocate freedom of women’s rights. Both Pipee and Astha are bisexuals who have normal sex life with their husbands. The gruesome murder of Aijaz leaves Pipee lonely
and shattered. She is drawn towards Astha who is herself reeling under the trauma of a suffocating traditional society. Their camaraderie burgeons into physical intimacy that seems to provide solace to both the troubled souls. In Pipee’s company, Astha experiences an awakening which is not just sexual. She realizes that she has at last found a soul mate who actually wants to know her; liberate her. And under the given circumstances, Astha feels “*there was no aphrodisiac more powerful than talking, no seduction more effective than curiosity*” (218). Astha trespasses the social conventions in her relationship with Pipee. Kapur tells her readers:

*They met on weekdays; evenings and weekends were out. Still Hemant caught a whiff of this new interest in his wife’s life and was free with his disapproval…indeed had Pipee been a man Astha would have found it impossible to stray so far down the road of intimacy or be comfortable on it”*(218).

Though Astha feels a sense of relief in her intimate friendship with Pipee, she is aware that this would not offer a solution to her problem because it carried a social stigma with it. Manju Kapur through her rendition of lesbian relationship between her protagonist and Pipee challenges the issue of gender discrimination.

Speaking to Ira Pande in one of her candid chats, she says:

*…although so much has been made of this lesbian relationship, it occupies only a third of the total novel. Astha’s relationship with her husband is actually the main story. As long as she remained chained to the role of a dutiful wife, mother and daughter-in-law, Astha was in danger of lapsing into such a whining creature that I had to do something to propel her life forward. This relationship suggested itself to me as an interesting means of making Astha mature and change. An affair with a man would have been a*
classic cliché and so I ruled it out and tried out a same- sex affair (The Hindu-online edition).

Eminent psychologist Sigmund Freud has acknowledged the fact that it is difficult to fathom the sexuality in women. Feminists perceive sexuality as a cultural construct as against others who consider it biological or genetic. According to them, a woman turns into a lesbian when she fails to find sexual satisfaction which is a fundamental human need. In this context Miti Pandey observes that,

*Marriage in the Feminist writing has been problematized and seen as the device of the patriarchal system and no longer the logical culmination of man and woman relationship where staying together is the challenge to all parties involved. Marriage itself is a difficult enough business for two people to merge into identity* (94).

Asta’s initial years of marriage are a fairytale. Like any other married woman she enjoys her marital bliss. “She felt like a woman of the world, that was covered with the film of her desire, and the fluids of their sex” (46). But with passage of time, she becomes a victim of her husband’s neglect and condescending behavior.

Expressing her opinion about the wife’s predicament eminent Feminist Simone de Beauvoir says:

*A husband regards none of his wife’s good qualities as particularly meritorious...he is ignorant of her dreams, her fancies, her nostalgic yearnings, of the emotional climate in which she spends her day* (Beauvoir 492)

Kapur’s Astha experiences a similar apathy in her marriage. Hemant fails to respect Astha as a wife as a result of which Astha is left emotionally dry. On an impulse she even feels it appropriate to get out of a terrible marriage but strongly grounded in tradition that she is, she cannot give up her children, her family and the security of a marriage. This then raises the question on Astha’s deviant
behavior. Lesbianism is a violation of the sexual code of conduct decreed by a heterocratic society for a woman. Astha’s frustration and dissatisfaction in marriage and her need to create a space for herself and her inherent urge to fill that void in her emotional life propels her towards the untoward. Astha is not a lesbian by nature. For Astha,

...paradoxically the heterosexual world became one of choice and the lesbian world, an incidental happening. She is not a woman whose sexual desire is focused on another woman. Astha’s bonding with Pipee is not a choice exercised by a woman who would take the initiative to start and sustain a lesbian relationship (Chandra 123).

4.8.3 Sita - Astha’s Mother

Asthा’s mother Sita is a woman of the old generation. She is very docile with firm faith in traditional values. She is a traditional wife who never questions her husband’s decision in matters. She takes care of Astha and is extremely protective about her trying to shield her from any kind of problem. She gets an inkling of her daughter’s liaison with Bunty. Considering its disturbing influence on Astha’s academics, she terminates their friendship by discussing the matter with Bunty’s parents. She was very suspicious of her daughter and did not keep off from prying into her diary. A traditional mother, she becomes restless to see her daughter married and settled at the right time.

When Astha gets a proposal for her marriage from Hemant Vader, the US educated son of a bureaucrat from an affluent family in Delhi, Sita is very excited. She is happy at the thought of seeing Astha have her own house.

Sita becomes very lonely after her husband’s death. She understands her limitations. Astha’s mother had all her life compromised her desires giving importance to the interests of her husband. A spiritual woman she never got to
visit a temple. However, after disposing off her property she decides to spend the rest of her life as a widow in an ashram in Rishikesh. Sita is portrayed as a submissive woman who does not have an identity of her own. She reconciles herself to the circumstances and resigns to her fate.

4.8.4 Mrs. Trivedi

Mrs. Trivedi is Pipeelika’s mother. She was married to a man who was twenty years her senior. Mrs. Trivedi is said to have spent much of her adult life as a widow. She is a woman of courage who does not seek help from her husband’s family or her own in raising her son and daughter. She works as a teacher in a residential school and is able to provide her children good education. Ajay settles down in USA and Pipeelika completes her M A from Delhi School of Economics. When Pipee expresses her decision to marry a Muslim, her mother discourages her but on meeting him personally approves of her daughter’s choice. Mrs. Trivedi does not believe in imposing her decision on her children. Her children grow up to be independent individuals strong, confident and self-willed.

4.8.5 Astha’s Sisters-in-law

Hemant has two sisters who are both older than him. They are married before Astha comes into the Vader family as Hemant’s wife. Seema is settled in America and Sangeeta in India. Sangeeta has two children - Samir and Shefali. Sangeeta’s in laws always trouble her. They treat her very badly and she often fights with her husband. These things have negative effect on the lives of the children. Shefali’s parents offer her to occupy the first floor of their newly constructed house in Vasant Vihar.

Seema lives in America. Though she enjoys material prosperity she is not happy in the true sense. Seema contemplates divorcing her husband on account of his promiscuity. Here again is a woman who suffers humiliation and reconciles to her
painful plight out of her sense of duty towards her children. Both Astha’s sisters in law are victims of patriarchal thinking. Sangeeta suffers more than Seema. The novel deals with the problems of women and Manju Kapur highlights the fact that the fate of women all over the world is the same.

**4.9 Male Characters in ‘A Married Woman’**

Manju Kapur introduces her readers to the male characters in the novel as representing two different generations. While Mr. Vader and Astha’s father belong to the first generation, Hemant and Aijaz belong to the second. There appears a great difference in the ideologies and attitude among the men of both generations. Though Astha’s father believes in education for women and encourages Astha to prepare for IAS, he cannot forsake the idea of her marriage which is a duty every parent must carry out. He represents the class of simple, hardworking and honest government employees. He is not cunning and is unaware of the techniques of making money. Of course he takes care of the finance at home and believes in having the final say in all matters. The same is the case with Mr. Vader. He is the head of the family and the patriarch. Two opposite ideologies become apparent in the characters of Hemant and Aijaz.

*I wanted to marry an innocent, unspoilt, simple girl….a virgin (41)*

These words of Hemant underscore the traditional streak in his nature. Hemant, though educated abroad is not liberal in his outlook. He doesn’t respect the feelings of Astha and in a way appears to be self-centered in his approach when he declares that while it is his prerogative to garner money for the family, it is Astha’s responsibility to bring up his children. When Astha is expecting their second child, Hemant’s desperate longing for a boy gives one the idea of gender bias. He never takes Astha’s job seriously nor does he encourage or appreciate her talent for sketching or writing poetry. In marriage too, Hemant perceives Astha as an object of sexual gratification. His typical male attitude becomes apparent when
he does not involve Astha in financial matters and takes complete liberty of spending her earnings without even making her aware of it. Hemant in every way represents a dominating male modeled on the norms of patriarchy.

Aijaz on the other hand is very considerate and sensitive. He respects women and never underestimates their capacity. He praises Astha’s talent of writing a script for a play during their theatre workshop. He treats her with respect and strangely Astha’s thirst for emotional support and appreciation is fulfilled by Aijaz. Astha’s desire for freedom is satiated in the company of Aijaz. He kindles her interest in writing and encourages her to pursue it. Aijaz believes in equality for women and practices it too.

Aijaz is seen to follow communist ideologies while and Hemant represents the capitalistic ideals. Aijaz wants communal harmony but Hemant thinks that Muslims must be sent to Pakistan. Aijaz respects the opinions of his wife and even treats his mother in law well. Hemant disapproves of Astha supporting her mother. Thus Kapur strikes a perfect balance between the two characters.

4.10 Portrayal of ‘Self’ of Female Protagonists in ‘A Married Woman’

Kapur’s novel A Married Woman presents a picture of different facets of a married woman. Her women Astha and Pipeelika are frustrated and disillusioned in life with their apprehensions and doubts about male integrity and their awareness of female frailty. Without actually being conscious, they are in search of a safe and comfortable zone to seek solace from their shattered conjugal lives. If Astha is a victim of male passion then Pipeelika becomes a victim of communal violence. Burdened under the pressures of their feminine role, they become oblivious of their personal agony, pain and anguish. Kapur vividly points out how in assuming the role of a traditional daughter, wife and mother, they almost sacrifice their individuality. Astha is visibly disturbed by the incidents in her life which though appear trivial, at times strangulate her ‘self’. Constant denial of being looked at
and respected as an individual by Hemant creates an emotional void that is later filled with the fountain of love showered upon her by Pipee. The machine like Astha feels suddenly transformed into a human being. Totally oblivious of her surrounding realities she drifts towards a solid ground from where she desires to view the world of freedom. Pipeelika is that lively soul that frees Astha from her chaotic convulsions. She fortifies her existence by infusing in her the feminine rights. The force of love rejuvenates Astha and she basks in the sunshine of an awareness of her ‘self’.

The physical bonding between Astha and Pipee display sexual overtones and may be viewed as a lesbian relationship although the narrative does not use the word ‘lesbian’. Bonnie Zimmerman characterizes “a lesbian narrative as one which has a central lesbian character, placing love and sexual passion between women at the centre of the story and being read by lesbians to affirm lesbian existence”[33](117) Although Kapur’s narrative does not adhere to the above idea, both Astha and Pipee enjoy each other’s bodies and there exists a passionate sexual union between the two. Kapur describes, “They had been skin on skin, mind on mind with nothing in between” (303). It is interesting to note here that while the lesbian attempts nudge Pipeelika to a world of forgetfulness, for Astha it is a case of rebellion against her husband Hemant. It is a sweet vengeance directed towards the man who by his complete indifference thwarts her attempts to rise as a woman and enjoy her own identity in the male-dominated world.

Kapur doesn’t allow her protagonists to continue with the so called lesbian bonding for long. Rooted in tradition Kapur’s Astha gives priority to her family and the tender relationship between Astha and Pipee can no longer travel the expected path. Astha’s ‘homecoming’ goes on to explain the supremacy of traditional heterosexual union ordained by patriarchy-an oppressive institution over the family that Pipee suggests - union of two women - a lesbian relationship.
Kapur’s Astha is forthright in her challenge against patriarchal thought and convention, social framework and the power system that rests in the hands of insensitive men. Impelled by her desire to escape from her meaningless existence, Astha opts for an unconventional sexual bonding which though brings her pleasure, comfort and excitement, yet it cannot be her way of life. Kapur’s novel is thus a well-balanced narration of a married woman’s anguish, and her psychological unrest which is as complicated as the social and political unrest against the backdrop of which the story is set. Thus, in depicting the inner subtlety of a woman’s mind, Kapur juxtaposes the personal with the external.

4.11 Conclusion

Manju Kapur is one of those few women novelists in English, who has toyed with the idea of presenting the spate of sufferings every woman endures in their journey from womb to tomb. Women become victims of male-atrocities as early as their birth and their victimization assumes even greater dimensions as they grow. Kapur has dared to question the problems of identity among women in society and attribute the causes of her subservient position to family, culture, marriage, tradition and man-woman relationships. She has presented her protagonists who belong to the middle class, as craving for that independence and space which, they believe can be attained only through education. The search for identity among the female protagonists of Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters and A Married Woman displays Manju Kapur’s mature understanding of the female psyche. She has very gently probed into the troubled minds of her protagonists who are seen to sail through disappointments in family, marriage, relationships and society in general. She has tried to voice their existentialist angst which is directed towards a society that has always tried to subvert her dreams and desires to live and breathe as an ‘individual’. However, it has been deduced that Kapur’s protagonists Virmati, Swarnalata, Astha or Pipeelika are not weak. In their search for ‘self’ we see them transition from ‘innocence’ to ‘awareness’, and watch them grow from a ‘victim’
to an ‘empowered’ woman. Thus, the estranged Virmati’s re-union with her mother and Astha’s ‘home-coming’ underscore a major shift from the ‘language of suffering’ to the ‘language of empowerment’.
Works Cited

15. Ibid. p.330.
23. Kapur, Manju. A Married Woman. Faber and Faber, 2010, p.1. (All quotations are taken from this edition with page no. in parenthesis)


