Chapter - II

CHANGING SCENARIO

Indian women writers have successfully attempted to break the literary and social name of the past. They delve deep into the psyche of their character and also herald new concept of morality. They picture the change of notion in their characters due to the exposure to education and their conflicting state. They visualize the present condition of women, where they are exposed to a new set of values with education and economic condition putting them in a rather conflicting state where they desire independence while they dread their traditional role but are still not courageous to walk out of the situation. They have caught the Indian women who were at a juncture between existing and changing life style in trying to redefine their identity and have portrayed them realistically both psychologically as well as physically in their novels and thus have contributed to a fresh exploration of the role and status of the women in coetaneous Indian society. Women writers are involved in redefining the personal and domestic roles of women with the basic thrust on breaking of taboos and recasting of identities in the mould of their expectations. They even try to analyze the significant changes in what women could do – often characterized as a movement from the private to the public sphere. This shift was neither abrupt nor permanent and many women, who briefly got educated, continued to live in the more traditional fashion. They
continuously accepted the supremacy of the patriarchal value system by surrendering meekly to their traditionally assigned roles and allowing themselves to be dominated. The scene of evolution pictures the financially independent women and their gradual changes in the outlook of the character.

Freedom to know, act and enjoy is a basic postulate of the socio-cultural world and when these thoughts arise, a woman thinks deeply about her identity. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the changes taking place in the society like access to education, economic independence which in turn gave them the strength to resist the secondary treatment given to women.

In a culture where individualism have often remained alien ideas and marital bless and the women’s role at home is a central focus. Manju Kapur’s novels acquire a significant new meaning and they furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the importation of tradition. The conflict for autonomy and separate identity remains as an unfinished combat. Women under the patriarchal pressure and control were subjected to much more brunts and social ostracism. They were discriminated and were biased in the lieu of their sex. Manju Kapur’s female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged with in the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking to which their family and society turns intolerant. They
struggle between tradition and modernity. It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they plunge into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves. The novelist has portrayed her protagonists as a woman caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day. A skillful enticing novel *Difficult Daughters* with great narrative eloquence starts with the funeral pyre, the heroine burnt at the cremation with tear-stricken people clustered around. In this novel concept of education to woman is to produce home-makers and to support the traditional values of Indian society. An intricate mental agony and complexity of the woman is clearly depicted in this novel. The book is interesting for reasons that are not just literary but because Kapur has an unusual angle on the involvement of women in Gandhi’s Swaraj. Kapur emphasizes the efforts made at the time by numerous women, who while demanding equal opportunities go beyond convention. The story of *Difficult Daughters* tells the tale not only of Virmati, but of other *Difficult Daughters* who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggles for Independence in their lives. Virmati’s daughter Ida is shown as leading a free life compared to her mother. Kapur investigates in the novel, issues such as education, marriage and polygamy. It is centered on the life of Virmati, the female protagonist, who struggles to form an independent identity for herself, but fails having fallen in love with a married man. The notion of education is an important element discussed in the novel, and allows distinction between the
two sets of women. The traditional women, who adhere to the standards of the society they thrive in, and exercise their agency in a limited fashion are juxtaposed with the modern women, who not only are aggressive and follow their desires, but also control and impose their agency within the society. Ganga and Kasturi represent the former category, while Swarnalata and Shakuntala are emblematic of the latter category. Virmati, does not belong to either of these categories. Virmati is not able to confine herself in the traditional role expected of her, but is also not entirely modern.

In *Difficult Daughters* one can listen to Virmati’s voice. She could not speak out, living at the juncture of two oppression colonialism and patriarchy. What we have is her daughter’s reconstruction and representation. Though at the centre of the narrative is a woman, who fights but falls and fails Kapur shows in Virmati, the plight of many an Indian woman living during the period having similar desires and notions. Virmati remains in constant conflict with tradition, is at loggerheads with her parents and is contemptuous towards the institution of marriage which is considered as the be all and end all for a girl’s life especially in India. Virmati’s struggle is not to be taken lightly just because she failed for what mattered was to have made the attempt. As Mc.Cutchion puts it rightly,
“Manju Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Shifting a balance between a natural co-existence and unfettered freedom and space on the other Kapur’s eloquent narration of women’s issues is nevertheless, both Indian and Universal.” (Cutchion: 34).

The novel spans three generation of women. Kasturi, the mother represents Pre-Independence period and is shown as a victim of the offensive control of patriarchy, Virmati the daughter represents country struggle for Independence and her own struggle, as she too rebels against convention of morality. Ida, Virmati’s daughter belongs to the Post Independence period. An intricate mental agony and complexity of woman is clearly depicted in this novel. Virmati at the age of ten attuned to signs of her mother’s pregnancies takes care of her sisters and brothers and keep them clean and tidy. She is the girl who expected affection and sign of special love from her mother but often ignored due to her mother’s continuous delivery. At the age of sixteen she settled into housekeeping for her mother. She is unhappy that she could never have her mother so much to herself and she yearns for mother’s love. Her mother is blind to her yearnings.

“I’m tired of knitting and sewing’ flared Virmati.’ besides’ I’m here to look after you.
‘I can look after myself’

‘Why did you bring me if you don’t need me mati? Said Virmati with a thick lump in her throat.

‘What is all this nonsense? (DD: 12)

Virmati, like other women is asked to accept typical arranged marriage she rebels against that decision and insist on her right to be educated. Her mother is not able to understand Virmati’s desires at all:

“She had always been so good and sensible. How could she not see that her happiness lay in marrying a decent boy, who had waited patiently all these years, to whom the family had given their word? What kind of learning was this that deprived her of her reason? She too knew the value of education; it had got her her husband, and had filled her hours with the pleasure of reading.” (DD: 60)

Virmati gets impressed by her cousin Shakuntala’s independence, freedom and education. Shakuntala has become an inspiring example who looked vibrant and intelligent as she had a life of her own; her manner was expansive as she didn’t look shyly around for approval. Virmati got very impressed by Shakuntala’s activities. When all the family members looked at her differently, Virmati was
happy to be independent and she wanted to be like Shakuntala but being the eldest in the family she had responsibilities.

Virmati begins to value education and other higher things in life. She realizes that life’s horizons are not only wider, but there are things even beyond the horizons that still remain unconquered. Virmati is very much impressed by her cousin’s education as she looked vibrant and intelligent. She is inspired by her speech and the style of grooming. She is drawn towards her cousin, whose thinking is beyond marriage.

“The cousins were taking an evening walk. ‘These people don’t really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else. But for my mother, marriage is the only choice in life. I so wish I could make her feel better about me.” (DD: 17)

These impressions created deep aspiration in Virmati’s mind and she tried to find the bright future outside the home. She thought that she had to fight with her mother who considered Virmati’s education to be over; due to her continuous breeds she had not paid much attention to Virmati’s education:
“Virmati had been sent for higher studies to Stratford College in the civil lines, double-storeyed, red-brick, gardened, with gracefully arched corridors. After that, classes IX and X, and then two years to get a Fine Arts Degree. And then marriage, said elders. Thirteen year old Virmati listened and felt the thrill of those approaching rites.”

*(DD: 20)*

After her house keeping with her mother, she returned to Amritsar where she could not perform her studies well and complaint had come from the Mahavidyalaya. Much importance was not given to Virmati’s education. Instead her mother told, that there were many things in life than mere education. Very often she felt like revolting and breaking the age old traditional barriers and doing something different. Virmati’s marriage was fixed. No amount of persuasion could make her mother see reason. She irritably yells: “At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother.” *(DD: 22)*

Virmati finds no means of escape and all attempts at persuasion lost her dream of being educated and the inspiration she has got from her cousin created flux in her mind. Meanwhile Harish Chandra, the professor along with his family had come to Lepel Griffin Road and began staying as paying guest at the house of Lajwanti (Virmati’s paternal aunt). Virmati is inspired by the Professor’s
knowledge and education. Through his wife she has come to know that Professor really cared for women’s education. She was deeply impressed by the Professor and considered him noble for his concern towards women’s education. Virmati’s marriage was postponed due to death in both the families and she began attending college regularly. In the Professor’s class, Virmati sat in the front row with the other girls. She sat glued to him and the professor in turn was attracted to her.

“The professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily. It moved him so deeply that he remembered it in all its detail even when his children had grown up. The murmur and rustle of students with scratching pens, their heads receding in rows, the whirr and click-click of the fans overheard, and the stillness at the heart of it, enclosing him and Virmati, Virmati with her offering eyes in her open face.” (DD: 47)

The professor professes his love to Virmati and seduces her through culture, sending her patriarchal sonnet and through referring to Machiavelli and the Greek tragedy, until he gains complete control over her mind. The professor wants to have Virmati not as a wife but to gratify the intellectual needs, although Virmati believes that she and professor are bound together by the band of intellectual compatibility, it is physical lust that overpowers them, whenever they
are together. “The professor turned Virmati towards himself and cupped her face in his hands. He took off her glasses, then stroked her face, with small, caressing gestures, he kissed her eyes, her nose…. (*DD*: 67). They both were in love with each other, but the path to love never runs smooth. The social barricades and moral hurdles label their relationship as ‘illicit’. The family again started about the marriage and Virmati was in a distressed mood and wanted to stop the marriage but she was in complete dilemma that she is betraying her family by her activities.

“Wasn’t her future partner decided by the first touch of a man on her body? Even though in this case it meant humiliating her grandfather, who was publicly associated with female education, betraying her father who had allowed her to study further, and spoiling the marriage chances of her siblings.” (*DD*: 57)

Virmati tried to convince her mother by telling about her cousin and her studies. Kasturi was very much disturbed by Virmati’s appeal and desperately explained the duties of the eldest daughter.

“Your grandfather and father both have confidence in you, otherwise would they have given you so much freedom? They thought school and college would strengthen you, not change you. Now what will
they feel when you want us to break our word and destroy our good name? How will they understand it?” (DD: 59)

Kasturi felt that education has changed her daughter’s mind and behavior and her despair increased and she recalled her past memories about the value of education and how it has brought her husband, she felt sad about the present generation and their ideology. Virmati’s mother was adamant and would not allow her to have her ways. Talks of marriage filled the air and everybody in the house could think of nothing else but Virmati’s impending marriage. Virmati remained passive and silent, and every word fell on a deaf ear. Things began to get out of control and Virmati contemplates suicide. She made a futile attempt at drowning.

“Virmati walked a little beyond this point. She took off her chappals and folded her duppatta on top of them. She stared into the water. She knew that the spot where she was standing was where the water began to feel the strong pull of the small canal. Though a good swimmer, she did not expect to be able to resist the current.” (DD: 76)

Virmati and Harish, however communicated through letters, exchanging every minute detail of things happening. Even their conversation was about the
world affairs and about the current events. They discussed intellectually and Virmati loved the discussions and impressed by the professor’s words that she should be perfect and good in her education and action which she was not heard by anyone in her family. There were talks about partition. Money, goods and arms were being sent out of India for war and purpose. Virmati and professor discussed everything from war to unity, to books. Virmati was drawn by these intellectual correspondences as she could not converse with her own family.

“She had composed letters with unusual care, trying to make sure there were no grammatical or spelling mistakes in it. She knew those annoyed him. I want you to be perfect, the Professor had told her. And she had blushed with pleasure. Nobody else had ever seen her as someone who could be perfect.” (DD: 74)

Finally, it was decided, although reluctantly, that Virmati would go to Lahore for further studies. Her mother made one last attempt at making her see reason “If you cannot consider your duty to us, at least consider yourself. There is a time in the cycle of life for everything. If you willfully ignore it like this, what will happen to you? A woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings.” (DD: 111). As Jai deep Rishi points out in his essay; “Kasturi unknowingly becomes the voice of patriarchy. She holds those values as ideals
which patriarchy has taught her to be so and when her daughter rebels against such values she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self.” (Rishi, 23) Kasturi accompanied Virmati to Lahore where they were welcomed by Shakuntala. She explained about education and its importance to Kasturi. Kasturi left her daughter in the college and felt sad that her daughter left marriage to be alone and to get educated. “For living in a solitary, poky little room in a strange city, for eating hostel food, for the loneliness of single life.” (DD: 115). Her sense accepts to only that which has been set up as a norm in society. Any deviation from the so-called path is not acceptable to her. Her entire being is devoted to the cause of upholding the customs of her family and she tries to drill the same thoughts in her daughter Virmati. In the same novel we could see Virmati’s cousin a completely liberated woman, who never believes that marriage is not the only thing in a woman’s life. Shakuntala is an M.Sc Chemistry working at Lahore. She is intelligent, independent, sophisticated and above all rebellious in her attitude. She depreciates the concept of marriage as the summum bonum of life and reacts to this traditional idea, but women are still supposed to marry and do nothing else. She advises her to live like a free bird and says “Time are changing and women are moving out of the house, So why are you?” (DD: 45). The reaction expressed by Shakuntala evidences Kapur’s rebellious attitude against the servitude of women. She uses this character as her mouth piece and advocates freedom and education for Indian women and their participation in national re-construction. Shakunatala is
independent and lives her life without any inhibitions and is confident about her identity. Her life style is glamorous. Virmati watched her ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother’s advice and buy anything she wanted without thinking that it is a waste of money, casually drop in on all the people the family knew. Above all, she never seemed to question or doubt herself in anything. Shakuntala’s behaviour is viewed with contempt and disdain especially within her own family. She studies, teaches and takes part in the political-Gandhian movement. Even after marriage, she keeps a firm grip on her autonomy and her freedom of action and thought.

“Another word about Shaadi,’ continued Shakuntala, and I’m going back to Lahore”. Kasturi laughed indulgently while Lajwanti sniffed disapprovingly in the background. “When will this girl settle down? She asked rhetorically. ‘All the time in the lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences. I tell her she should have been a man. (DD: 16)

Shakuntala thus becomes a pole of attraction for Virmati and impressed by her life style and liberation. Her education gave her independence in thinking and developed her mind and life style. Virmati listened and is thrilled by her
conversation with her mother, but she is drawn towards Shakuntala, to one whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and children.

“My friends are from different backgrounds, and all have families unhappy with their decision not to settle down, as they call it, continued Shakuntala. ‘We travel, entertain ourselves in the evenings, follow each other’s work, read papers, attend seminars. One of them is even going to abroad for higher studies.” (DD: 17)

Nadia Ahmed says that “Virmati is trying to achieve a level of modernity through education and social mobility, but she finds herself stumbling on traditional values that haunt her efforts to grasp female agency. Her inner conflict is very much the issue of reconciling and tradition.” (Ahmed, 21) Virmati encounters a woman who leads a similar life-style; her friend, an ultra-committed activist, takes her to a meeting of the Punjab Women’s Student Conference where she shines as an orator. Swarnalata is another example of a self-sufficient woman. She is Virmati’s roommate in Lahore, when Virmati pursues her B.A. in a local college for women. Swarnalata also has strong goals in her life, which look beyond the conventions of marriage.
“They had no choice,” Swarna arched her eyebrows, totally in control of her life I was clear that I wanted to do something besides getting married. I told my parents if they would support me for two more years I would be grateful. Otherwise I would be forced to offer satyagrah with other congress workers against British, and go on offering it until taken to prison. Free food and lodgings at the hands of the imperialists.” (DD: 107)

Swarnalata is passionate and fanatical about the Satyagraha movement. Like Shakuntala, her independence has a purpose. She is similar to Shakuntala and encourages Virmati to become self-sufficient. She says that marriage is not the only thing in life. The war, Satyagraha movement because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. “Taking Jobs, fighting, going to Jail. Wake up from your stale dream.” (DD: 139)

Swarnalata’s ideals differ from Virmati. Like Shakuntala she too continues her political activity, and makes Virmati regret for she is not like those two women, who fight for the nation. Virmati felt uncomfortable as she always did when Swarna started talking about the many things she was involved in. She is a national activist and participated in speeches, Anti-Pakistan conference, the Arya Bhasha sammelan conference, the Urdu Conference, the India History Conference,
the Punjab Azad Christian Conference, the All India Sikh league etc. Virmati wanted to participate and tried to get involved in these conferences feeling guilty that she restricted her duties at home and for the Nation. Virmati accompanied Swarna for the conference even with her worst health condition, when she felt weak Swarna gave her courage. Virmati came across women like Mohini Datta, Sita Rallia, Mary Singh, Mrs Leela Mehta, who were involved in the National Movement. They all appeared so remote from her. She begins to contemplate.

“I am not like these women. They are using their minds organizing, participating in conference, politically active, while my time is being spent in love, but then how come I never have a moment for anything else? Swarna does. And she even has a ‘friend’, who lives in the city. (*DD*: 142)

Virmati could see women speak for the nation and gets privileged to participate for the unity of the country. The leader congratulated college girls for participating in the progressive forces and praised that 360 students were in jail due to their participation in the Satyagraha movement. Virmati could even listen to Swarnalata’s speech continued with heavy applause.
“We know what it is like to have our freedom threatened. The ban on strikes, particularly in Kinniard and Khalsa colleges is an attempt to muzzle the student movement, to stifle our voices. We know their efforts will be in vain. Our united front will prove that. But we must not falter, or be cowed down.” (DD: 145)

And as these newly awakened women carried out research projects, wrote and spoke about the problems and attempted to institute new programs, they too faced challenges. Their own institutions and families were less supportive than expected and recipients of this attention were always grateful even then they echoed for the nation and fought for the revolution, participated in the organizations and conferences and they remained clear headed about their decision and what needed to be done. Education made them articulate for their freedom and overwhelmingly leads them to participate for the nation’s freedom. Their deviant behaviour has become acceptable due to their knowledge and redefined them. Kapur speaks about another sort of women Kasturi and Ganga, where Kasturi’s education made her enter into a decent family whereas Ganga’s ignorance of not being educated made her to share the life with Virmati. Kasturi and Ganga, remain within the conventions designed by numerous cultural traditions. There are vivid portrayals of the changing scenes in Difficult Daughter. The reasons for educating a girl may be to get a bridegroom but men are prepared to send them to school and
are no more interested in child marriages. Kasturi is being educated to get into the
decent family. During the 19th century, progressive Arya Samajists recognized the
importance of giving education to women. Her survival depended on upholding an
educated man who could control her lives. Kasturi’s father as a follower of Swami
Dayanandji was very much concerned that she should not get married early as per
the ideology of Swami Dayanandji. She was even sent to Christian missionary for
education. Her uncle stressed that there is no question of child marriage, he
stressed that the marriage was a union between rational, consenting adults and thus
its sanctity would be preserved. He even continued that in Arya Patrika
advertisements state that educated boys want to get married to educated girls. He
further claimed that, once she gets into proper education she will transform herself
to Hindu womanhood. By these effort Kasturi became the first girl in her family to
postpone the arrival of the wedding guests by a tentative assault on learning.

“She learned reading, writing, balancing household accounts and
sewing. Above all, the school ground the rituals of Arya Samaj
Havan, Sandhya and meditation so deeply within her that for the rest
of her life she had to start and end the day with them.” (DD: 62)
During these sessions never did Kasturi forget that she has been trained for the marriage and her education paved way for the glorious destiny. After her schooling she has been trained at her home by her mother.

“After five years of education, it was considered that Kasturi had acquired all that it was ever going to be useful for her to know. She appeared for her first and last outside exam, performed creditably, and graduated at the age of twelve, to stay at home until she married.” *(DD: 62)*

After her education in school completed, her formal schooling continued at home. Her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by the impeccable nature of her daughter’s qualification.

“Kasturi spent her free time sewing. If she wasn’t doing the family stitching, she was working on the phulkaris for her trousseau. The phulkari stitch was a simple one. With sweets made of thickened milk. With papad, the sweet ones made out of ripe mango, the sour ones with raw mango.” *(DD: 63)*
Kasturi’s father was impressed by her clandestine activity, gentleness, tranquility, beauty and modesty and felt that she would be rewarded by a good husband. Her marriage was fixed with Suraj Prakash and tradition quietly drifted and the couple was allowed to meet even though Kasturi’s mother was against it.

“Kasturi’s father had done his duty, kept his word. He was aware that the cause for which he had done so much, education in Sultanpur, was talked over in many homes after Suraj Prakash had made his visit and won his bride.” (DD: 66)

Kasturi viewed education as a quality, which made her a better wife. Immediately after her marriage, she was praised by her new family members. People praised her and complimented her. Her father-in-law said that “only an educated bride would do for his son.” Kasturi is particular about the role of a woman as well as one’s duty towards their family and society. Kasturi’s values adhered to the social standards expected in the society. Her education and knowledge carved her as an educated woman within the family. Unlike Virmati, she didn’t change her values. Ganga is very much fragile when compared all other characters. She is an illiterate, because of her family’s upbringing that did not impose education as a necessary pre-requisite for a successful threshold. Ganga’s
husband wanted an intellectual bride as a companion and tried to educate her but failed in his effort.

“Here, ‘her husband would say, going over them once, twice. Now you read them on your own. Copy them down in this notebook afterwards that will help you memorize them. We’ll do the next lesson tomorrow.’ The Woman copied down the letters carefully, but when it came to her husband’s daily test, she found she had forgotten.” *(DD: 40)*

Ganga felt uneasy of the “business” of teaching and education, because it constantly reminded her of the difference between her and her husband and it was the lack of education, which made her seem inadequate in his eyes. Ganga’s world revolves around her family and her husband and she does everything according to his likes. She doesn’t know about her freedom and never even felt that she had one.

“After her marriage, her mother-in-law made sure she learned that she learned the ways of her in-law’s household from the moment of her arrival. All of this was part of growing up, she knew, but how was she ever to dream without the desire to read and write, she was
going to be defenseless into union with a man so unlike the others she knew, who didn’t seem to care about her household skills at all.”

*(DD: 37)*

Ganga had learned the arts of the threshold, but was married to a progressive husband. Kapur’s creation of Ganga allows her to discuss many social overtones such as childhood marriage as Ganga had been prepared to manage a household since the tender age of twelve. However, Ganga’s skills are futile and are unable to attract Harish and she failed in her marriage life due to her lack in education. Thus Manju Kapur pictures the women of the transitional period-some at vantage point like Kasturi and some others at the receiving end like Ganga and some others in dilemma like Virmati. Kapur showed the dimension and ideology of three generation of women and their success and failure in their life due to the education.

Anita Desai focuses on the injustice meted out to women in her novel *Fasting Feasting* by juxtaposing the treatment of a brother and a sister in a family. Anita Desai in a subtle way brings out the birth that the change in society can come about only when the men and women become conscious of it. Further it is implied in the title itself that it is a novel of contrast between two cultures, the one, Indian, known for its pious and longstanding customs representing ‘fasting’ and
the other, American, a country of opulence and sumptuousness epitomizing ‘feasting’. The plot unveils through the perceptions of Uma, in India, and of Arun, in America. Both of them are entrapped, irrespective of the culture and enveloping milieu, by oppressive bonds exercised by their own parents, Mama Papa. They are just Mama Papa or papa mama but remain nameless throughout the novel. Yet this namelessness does not indicate their anonymity but signifies their universality. They are the prototypical parents found everywhere in the middle class families of India, who discuss, plan, plot, control, govern the activities of their children, be it marriage or going abroad for studies. And in their over-domineering concern, they tend to ignore the inadvertent possibility of entrapping their own offspring. Thus, they do not give contingency to the fact that perhaps their children too can have a life to call their own. Justin Jain in Stains to the Roof writes that “Fasting Feasting is about cultural attitudes rather than surface exuberance for or an imitation of the others. More than that Desai is interested in family relationships how freedom remains an abstract idea and identity an elusive concept. May be even their own preoccupations, their own priorities, may be an agenda for themselves that goes beyond what they actually want for their children.” (26) The novel begins with a snapshot of mama papa in a contemplative mood: the parents sit, rhythmically swinging, back and forth. They could be asleep, dozing- their eyes are hooded- but sometimes they speak.” That is when a sudden deluge of ideas hit them and they order their eldest daughter, Uma, to carry them out without
delay. Uma is asked to inform the cook to prepare sweets for her father, with neglectful impatience that she has been already asked to pack a parcel to be sent to her brother Arun in America. While she comes literally running on her toes, she is entrusted with an additional job of writing a letter to their son. Somewhere in the middle of the novel, the reader understands that it is the usual scene that goes on in the household of Mamapapa. All morning Mamapapa have found things for Uma to do. It is as if Papa’s retirement to be spent in this manner-sitting on the red swing in the veranda with Mama, rocking, and finding ways to keep Uma occupied. As long as they can do that, they themselves feel busy and occupied.

“Uma goes off to see to the lemonade and MamaPapa settle down on the swing, their shuffle their feet out of their shoes and let them dangle, sigh, make a few adjustments and become two parts of one entity again, side by side, presenting the same indecipherable face to the world.” (FF: 13)

**Baker Miller** states “that is a generally accepted belief that, a woman exists to serve other person’s needs. In a male dominated world Uma represents the subtle change in the value system, which she achieves due to her silent non-cooperation and distinct independent approach in tackling situations.” (27). In this living under the demanding rule of Mama Papa, Uma is repressed, suppressed and
is imprisoned at home. The first part of the novel tells us in a flashback as how her brother Arun, who leaves his home for higher studies, but feels trapped by the very education that is meant to liberate him. Usually, at home, it would be an oppressive atmosphere even if one of the parents is overpowering. With regard to Uma, both of her parents appear to have merged into a single identity Mama Papa / Papa Mama.

Uma’s pain related to the barks and howls of dogs, the poetry of Maya’s anguish is to be seen in sharp contrast to that of the excruciating poverty of Uma’s entrapment. Catering to the whims and fancies of Mama Papa, but keeping her remorse self-contained, at one point of the novel, Uma feels utterly friendless and alone, even when she is at home and surrounded by her Mama Papa. In desperation, she thinks of writing a letter to a friend to share her grief but it only ends up with the realization that she has none to confide with:

“She could write a letter to a friend-private message of despair, dissatisfaction, yearning; she has a packet of note paper, pale violet with a pink rose embossed in the corner-but who is the friend? Mrs. Joshi? But since she lives next door, she would be surprised. Aruna? But Aruna would pay no attention, she is too busy. Cousin Ramu?”
Where is he? Had his farm swallowed him up? And Anamika – had marriage devoured her? (*FF*: 134)

However, it would be wrong to presuppose that Anita Desai shows Uma’s unattractiveness, clumsiness and dullness of mind as causes for her entrapment. In Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughter*, Kapur has illustrated the changes incurred in the daughters due to the education, whereas Anita Desai shows the concept of education as the way to get into marriage and here too woman succumbs, fights and is over ruled by the environment they belong to. Aruna fights over the situation, Uma tries but fails because of the domineering parents and Anamika succumbs to the domination. Education doesn’t allow women to define their problems, even when they try to do so they were restricted by parents and their families but in the same novel Aruna excels in her life and is liberated from customs and traditions. As in *Difficult Daughters*, Uma is also trained to look after her baby brother. When she told her mother that she has to do her homework, her mother scolded her for the irresponsibility.

“I have to go and do my homework”, she told her mother. I’ve got to get my sums done and then write the composition-

‘Leave all that,’ Mama snapped at her.
Uma had received such directions from Mama before; Mama had never taken seriously the need to do any schoolwork, not having gone to school herself.” (FF: 18)

After the family received the son, they have become proud to be the parents and Mama had given complete attorney by the Papa as she had borne a son to the family. This new arrival spoiled Uma’s education as she was almost weak in the education. Uma’s face becomes pale by the words uttered by Mama but she waited for her father’s decision as he sent her to the convent. Uma finds solace in the convent than in home and she stares at the Jesus’ statue, it satisfied her and confesses the prayer louder than any one else in the group. Uma doesn’t like the vacation and weekends and she arrives to school before everyone.

“There were wretched weekends when she was plucked back into the trivialities of her home, which seemed a denial, a negation of life as it ought to be, somber and splendid, and then the endless summer vacation when the heat reduced even that pointless existence to further vacuity.” (FF: 21)

Inspite of her raging enthusiasm, she was an abject scholar and often gets complaint that they would have to hold her back. Uma tries sternly to work out the
problems, to remember the phrases but she could win the game of education. She worries very badly to stay at home and every time begs her father to send her to school.

“Uma rubbed and rubbed at her exercise books with an increasingly black and stumpy eraser, struggled to work out her sums, to remember dates to spell ‘Constantinople; and over and over again she failed. Her record book was marked red for failure.” (*FF*: 21)

This has become the stern reason for Mama to withhold Uma from school and she was particular that she should look after her brother and to asked her to learn the proceedings at home as she would be ready for the marriage. Uma wanted to escape from her Mama and stumbled to St. Mary’s School and even gained courage to speak to Sister Agnes.

“Uma hurled herself at Mother Agnes, threw her arms around her waist, hid her face in the starched white cotton skirts, and howled aloud. She was a messy wmeer; her face was wet, her hair distraught. Her mouth was twisted and her eyes and nose ran. She flung herself down at the nun’s sandaled feet and lay on the floor, abjectly waiting.” (*FF*: 27)
Uma loved the games play at school; she pleaded the Sister Agnes to allow her to continue her studies by explaining that she has to take care of her brother with dribble running out of the corner of his mouth. She behaved in an abnormal way to give protection that is her school and Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus.

“she simply fainted- she was writhing, frothing a little at the mouth and moaning, banging her head to one side, then the other. When Mother Agnes tried to lift her, she began to roll so violently that Mother Agnes had to go to the door and call for help.” (FF: 29)

She then corresponded by her school van with Sister Teresa to home. Aruna looked her wide-eyed and Mama scolded her for her behaviour and claimed the reason that the convent is the cause for her madness. Mama started teaching Uma how to massage the baby, change the napkins and she nurtured him and took care of him. Uma is suddenly abandoned and attention is turned towards’ Arun. She likes the company of Uncle Ramu Bhai and her aunt Mira-Masi. Desai portrays Uma a thwarted character- clumsy, nearsighted, and slow, grey-haired, spinster living under the demanding rule by parents. Desai tells apparently the story of typical Indian family network. Girl children were trained to mind the younger one and do domestic work and then marry them off when they were in the right age.
“Mama worked hard at trying to dispose of Uma, sent her photograph around to everyone who advertised… (FF: 52)

Uma is not pretty, nor is she academic, she tried hard to fit in academics but failed and twice the family is duped into handing over a dowry as a part of an unsuccessful engagement but she is blameless in both situations. She finds happiness in academic Christmas cards, and arranging for Christmas eve but finally she herself found happiness occur in moments of near oblivion, as when she succumbs to fit in an ashram to which her pious Aunt Mira-Masi has taken her to the temple. When she was offered a job by Dr. Dutt, her mother protested since she did not want a change in her complacent life style and Uma loses the chance of getting employed.

‘I wish your parents had agreed but what could I say when your mother
Told me she was not well and needs to nurse her…

‘Dr. Dutt’, Uma cried “Uma cried mama is not she’s not…..” (FF: 148)

Uma’s polar opposite, her graceful, beautiful and brilliant cousin, Anamika’s confinement is more poignant. While Uma’s failure in her school
exams pressurizes her to stay at home. Anamika is intelligent and beautiful. She has been the pride of the family, her cousins Uma and Aruna looked at her with wonder and attracted by her nature and behaviour.

“As anyone might have predicted- and aunts and grandmothers had been doing for years- it was cousin Anamika who was the first fruit to be picked. Cousin Anamika, in distant Bombay, had seemed the blessed one of her generation from her birth onwards.” *(FF: 67)*

Even Aruna was pretty but Anamika had a steely determination, dogged ambitiousness that seemed to be born of desperation. Whenever she comes to Uma’s house both Uma and Aruna try to seek her attention towards them. Anamika was good even in her studies. This added credit to her behaviour and nature. She was liked by everyone and she was very amiable.

“Somehow Anamika managed to please them both, smile at all their suggestions, accept them with equal readiness. She never allowed herself to be pulled into one camp or another; she achieved constant love by remaining at the centre.” *(FF: 68)*
Not only had the cousins’ even the elders admired her cool, poised well-mannered behavior and graceful character. The relatives liked to have Anamika near them, asked her about her school and studies, for it was the astonishing truth that Anamika was not only pretty, and good, but an outstanding student as well.

“The relatives from all the corners of the land came streaming, happy to display their richest silks and jewels to each other. Then a little group formed of just their generation, and rampaged through the wedding marquee, and it was Anamika who prevented them from going too far, not by words or a look, but simply by her example which was cool, mannerly and graceful.” (*FF*: 69)

Her Excellence in education does not provide a happy life. She was brilliant enough to get scholarship for her studies and her parents did not send her abroad instead they kept the scholarship letter as the matter of pride to show it to the bridegroom.

“The scholarship was one of the qualifications they were able to offer when they started searching for a husband for her, and it was what won her a husband who was considered an equal to this prize of the family.” (*FF*: 70)
Anamika’s scholarship paved way to bring the best man for her who is equal in his education and medals and certificates. Uma and Aruna and all the girls were curious to see the bride groom and conscious of his own superiority and never have admired Anamika as the rarest gift in his life.

“He raised his chin and his nose- which was as long and sharp as a needle- and seemed to look over the top of her head as they exchanged heavy garlands of rose and jasmine, then sat before the ceremonial fire.” (FF: 71)

With all these elegance and qualifications she has been tortured by her in-laws and finally murdered by her mother-in-law. Her education didn’t give courage to face the family. Instead she had become submissive in her ways and finally murdered by the family. Desai portrays the two types of women one who without education and poised elegance with utter ignorance lost her marriage life and another one with all these qualities loses her life and burnt to ashes. Desai’s portrayal of Aruna differs from Uma and Anamika who wins in her life, by having control over life.

Anamika does so excellently in her final exams, that she wins a scholarship to Oxford. Yet, Anamika lives in a patriarchal society that considers higher
education to be the prerogative of males, and marriage as the major preoccupation of females. The scholarship obtained is used only as a means to win her a husband who is considered an equal to the family’s prestige. Here education doesn’t mean that gives liberation for the woman instead to show-cause herself in the Matrimony and finally killed by the in-laws. Desai portrays the pretty character Aruna who won in her life and transforms herself and desperately seeks to introduce change in the lives of others. Aruna’s search for identity is different. “When Aruna said to her laughing, ‘Uma, why don’t you cut your hair short? Like Lila Aunty? It will suit you, you know, she retorts with embarrassment ‘Tchh what silly ideas you have, and was not only annoyed but hurt as well.” (FF: 87)

Aruna’s life and her problem are different from that of Uma and Anamika. When Anamika and Uma lost their identity to seek freedom, Aruna achieves it in a different way. Aruna is bright and pretty and exists because of the way she could handle the problems. She was beauty conscious and dressed up neatly and had an attractive appearance.

“At thirteen, Aruna still had thin brown legs and wore her hair plaited and tied in loops over her ears with large ribbons. Aruna fluttered about in flowered silk, and the hair ribbons were replaced
with little shiny plastic clips and clasps, and flowers that she picked from the dusty shrubs and hedges…” (FF: 81)

While Mama searched energetically for a husband for Uma, families were already making enquiries about Aruna. No one had to teach her how to make samosas or help her to dress for an occasion. Even Uma studied in the same convent but had not learnt the style of living, and the ways to attract people. Aruna excel in her studies, whereas Uma shows her report card with red Fs. When Uma’s marriage failed and created a dismal mood in family, Aruna’s marriage gave pride to the family. Aruna is indifferent to her unlucky sister who failed in her marriage and asked her to be locked inside the room since her presence would be an embarrassment and she would lose her prestige in the groom’s family.

“She could listen to Aruna’s voice lashing at her, flailing her with accusations. She had spoilt the party, the cocktail party. What would Arvind think of Aruna who had a sister who was an idiot, a hysteric? So she should be put away, locked up, Aruna sobbed.” (FF: 104)

Aruna transforms herself and desperately seeks to introduce change in the lives of others. She cuts her hair, takes her make-up set wherever she goes, and calls her sister and mother as ‘villagers’ once they refuse to accept her
sophisticated and flashy style of life. For that reason she avoids visiting her ‘parents’ home and the rare occasions of her short visits are spent in blaming the untidiness of the surrounding and the inhabitants.

“Arvind had a job in Bombay and bought a flat in a housing block in Juhu, facing the beach, and Aruna said it was ‘like a dream’. These were the words that Aruna used in her letters. They were not words anyone in the town used, either because they did not know them or because nothing in their town merited them.” (*FF*: 105)

She even goes to the extent of scolding her husband when he spills tea in his saucer, or wears a shirt, which does not match, with his trousers. In this way, Aruna’s entrapment is different from the rest. She has liberated herself from the customs and dominating home rules that bind the rest of the characters like Uma and Anamika. Yet, in negating these codes, she ensnares herself in her mad pursuit towards a vision of perfection. And in order to reach that perfection she needs to constantly uncover and rectify the flaws of her family as well as of Arvind’s. Desai gives the vision of the life of three women where the two failed as they could not come out of the custom and tradition. Even Anamika who is educated could not fight to liberate herself from the torturing family and burnt to ashes. Uma also could not speak with her parents to provide the basic things and does
everything like the slave and even lost her life because she is submissive. Aruna wins her life and knows to tackle the situations and even protest against her parents to live the life as she wishes.

When *Fasting Feasting* deals with negligence of parents and their attitude to the girl child, Githa hariharan focuses on how an educated woman looking for companionship is thwarted by her husband and pictures psychological traumas of the frustrated house wife. Meera Sayal states that “Harihan’s language is poetic and teasing, but always measured, drawing us in and never providing answers so we shift and yearn with Devi as she realizes how many different faces and roles she has inherited. Her diction is pointed and the textures communicated exquisite. In terms of technique, her writing is masterful, she cannot write of an experience but will animate it with sharp and vivid life.” (32) Harihan uses the subversion of mythology in order to create a feminine self detached from conventionality. Mythological stories are not repeated but re-told in a different transformative way. Hariharan’s women go from a painful sense of alienation and a self divided between the old acquiescence and the new urge towards individualization to revolt against and to reject patriarchal imposition. In Githa Harihan’s *Thousand Faces of Night* the protagonist Devi, her mother Sita, her grandmother and Mayamma, the retainer in Devi’s Father-in-law’s house are all protestors of sort. Often their protest is silent and subtle after being subdued and subjected to torture and
neglect. Sometimes it is expressed too, but after a long period of patience and endurance. The age of Hariharan is undisputedly the most complex phase of the cultural history of India. There were quick transitions and subtle and unpredictable changes that redefined the identity of individual in general and of a woman in particular. The transition of cultural phase has been forcefully accelerated as the spread of education is also a factor of great significance in the life of the woman. The spread of education was confined to make people literate but it had new functions to perform. It is however the changes that took place in confronted the traditional values system that ruled over the Indian society with despotic authority. Education and employment redefined the women to become the integral part of this wave. Due to this society changed and the Githa hariharan women were no exception and they try to cross the cultural barriers. As Aamer Hussein states that “Devi who carries the name of that great goddess, the goddess who vanquished demons as if they were flies, is a person without any back bone. If Githa hariharan’s Devi exhibits any firmness of mind it is when she gets into and out of senseless relationships-once with Dan and the next time with Gopal. Both relationships are doomed to be nothing other than temporary answers to the dilemma which Devi faces in her life-dilemma of not knowing what to do with it.”(31). Devi the protagonist of the first novel – The Thousand Faces of Night, returns to Madras after obtaining a degree from the USA and she returns only to fall prey to the chaffing pressures imposed upon her by the old existing order.
Next comes Devi the modern Indian woman, educated abroad and meets Dan, a black, a bond of friendship forged between them. “They spoke to each other, over the music, in a short hand that fascinated Devi, but she could not bring herself to play impostor and speak like them.” (*TFN*: 4).

Devi returns to madras with an American degree, only to be sucked in by the old-order of things- a demanding mother’s love. Her life in America brimmed with anticipation and good intentions. She would shed her inhibitions, her burden of Indianness, and merged with charming remembrance.

“Two weeks to pack to cram her bulging, inadequate suitcases full of mementoes; two weeks to shut them tight in the airless recesses of her memory. She thought very little of what lay ahead. Her time was filled with reassuring rituals, items on her check-list, each to be neatly crossed out once accomplished; each ready then for cold storage.” (*TFN*: 2)

Each and every minute Devi was made to remember her situations by her mother’s letter about the bridegroom’s prospects. When she was in the airport she felt that her brief dream was over. But she was very much happy in her home-coming as she wanted to see her mother.
“But like a gift to celebrate my home-coming, Amma has kept them all at bay. In this fortress that shuts out the rest of the world, I grope towards her, and she weaves a cocoon, a secure womb that sucks me in and holds me fast to its thick, sticky walls.” (TFN: 13)

Devi wondered and compared the relationships of her friends with their mothers, where they discussed and chatted about boyfriends, quarreled and kissed each other. She let a deep sigh that even her mother and herself did not embrace or touch each other. It was not in their culture. But the long separation had drawn them together and made them a one celled-unit but it faded away within a month.

“We were intensely conscious of each other; we were pulled together by a tender protectiveness that encircled our necks with its fine threads. Drawn together, my dead father’s memory receding for the moment, we became not a family, but mother and daughter.” (TFN: 13)

When Devi explained her briefings about America, immediately her mother would stop her reminding her that she should come to the present and forget the past. Her mother insisted on changing her ways and be sociable with the relatives
as they are questioning about her behavior. Though Devi had lots of question in her mind, she couldn’t ask since her mother was decisive.

“My very presence, the new silk sari, my unforgotten Tamil, the gold chain around my neck, were enough. I sat with them, listened to their news bulletins of births, miscarriages, illnesses and deaths and answered their probing questions with evasive monosyllables.”

(*TFN: 14*)

Amma started arranging for the marriage, Devi felt a clog in her mind and was speechless and her mother invited bridegrooms to visit her. She felt very disturbed by the continuous visits and was cajoled by her mother that she would get a good south Indian Brahmin.

“So they were looking for an accomplished bride, a young woman who would talk intelligently to her scientist husband’s friends, but who would also be, as all the matrimonial ads in the Sunday papers demanded, fair, beautiful, home-loving and prepared to adjust.”

(*TFN: 17*)
Even though she was educated she had to accept the norms and conditions of her tradition of the continuous visits of the bride-groom. After frequent visits, the stranger called Mahesh regional manager was accepted as her partner as he fulfilled her mother’s expectations. Her marriage got over and she wished to share her feelings with her husband but he was detached and did not participate in her sentiments but alas only telling about himself. Devi gets tired and feels that she has only been listening to his stories and achievement.

“I find I can barely suppress my increasing longing to say, yes, we have said enough about your work, your tours, your company. A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling.” (TFN: 49)

These thoughts of sharing and a desire to be understood arise because of her education. When Mahesh was away for his office accomplishments she spends her time with her father-in-law and listened to his music and collection of records. She is interested in learning Sanskrit and expressed her wish to her husband and immediately gets the reply that it is useless. “Don’t be foolish,” he said. ‘The English translations are good enough. And what will you do with all this highbrow knowledge.” (TFN: 52). She felt that she was stripped by the stranger, who snaps his fingers and demanded a smiling handmaiden. She felt her education had left
her unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of her womanhood. Her loneliness made her to apply the post of a research assistant but she was stopped by her husband. Even though she was educated, she could not get the information about her husband’s profile and when she asked about his job he stopped her saying that she would not understand and that it was necessary for her.

“There is a lot of paper work of course, letters, reports, plans of action and targets. Then we have to know what the market wants. More important, some of us have to tell the market what it wants.”

(*TFN: 71*)

She felt her emotions were unseen and she had become aimless fool where she swallowed her hard-earned education bitter and indigestible in the shadows. Her life with Mahesh has become very much materialistic and when she tried to tell about her life in America, he stopped her by telling her not to overlook her shoulders.

“Look, you don’t have to tell me all this,’ Mahesh said. ‘We decided to get married, and neither of us was a child. Why agonize about what happened before? You should stop looking over your shoulder all the time” (*TFN: 77*)
The Writer through these scenes brings out how in many families though women were educated men were not ready to recognize the fact and wanted to put the women below them. Devi remembered her love with Dan where she could not express as she was bound with cultured norms and felt that it would not happen in her life. Dan is disappointed and he felt that her refusal is due to lack of taking risks. The truth is that Devi can clearly see that the culmination of their relationship could be catastrophic. Perhaps she also believes in the proverbial picture of perfect marriage. At this stage she represents the Indian Woman who has become aware of herself and her aspirations. Devi drifts into arranged marriage; she finds that she has strayed unexpected into an existence devoid of dialogue. She refuses to accept the insignificant and secondary status assigned to her by Mahesh. She wants an equal share in her matrimonial partnership. When Devi asks Mahesh to postpone a trip he does not understand and condescendingly comments,

‘Why don’t you postpone the trip? I said why don’t I pray to be born a woman in my next birth, then I won’t have to make a living at all......... *(FF: 54)*

Devi is frustrated and realizes that her education has done her no good.
“It is waiting all over again, for life to begin, or to end and begin again. My education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood.” \textit{(TFN: 54)}

Devi belongs to bandwagon of awakened women who want more. She is not a hard-core feminist who protests instantly but of a milder variety who first works towards an amicable solution. ‘You look so fragile, so feminine Mahesh said, it’s hard to believe that you don’t want a child’

‘I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh’s eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothingness, but my stubborn unrelenting womb’ \textit{(TFN: 93)}

Her concern about the relationship is genuine, but he ignores her frustrations and evades troublesome issues.

Devi grows agitated and introspective to arrive at a solution. Her determination dawns upon her and she decides to protest and assert her individuality. “I will gather together the fragments which pass for my life, however laughably empty and significant, and embark on my first real journey. I would like to do better than sneak out, a common little adulteress.” \textit{(TFN: 95)}
When Devi discarded her relationship with Dan she was at the threshold of her life and scared to take risk, but at this point she is bold enough to take risk as she has seen life from close quarters and wants to live. Gopal comes into Devi’s life raking embers buried in the ash of her hopes and dreams. In her search for care, concern and commitment she walks out of wedlock courageously. “Gopal’s wave of ragas, and what if fall with a thud, alone, the morning after? I will walk on, seeking a goddess who is not yet made.” (TFN: 95) In contrast Devi’s mother was educated, talented and got married at the ripe of 20, when her cousins were already mothers. “She had married late, at the ripe age of twenty, when her cousins were already mothers, she had brought with her as dowry twenty thousand rupees, her Veena, and a grim resolve to be the perfect wife and daughter-in-law.” (TFN: 136)

She would often play on her Veena in her marital home and her music would pervade the whole house. On one such occasion her father-in-law calls out to her. “I put down my knife in the kitchen and hurried to her room. But he got there first, and I heard him roar, “Put that Veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter in law?” (TFN: 30)

Sita decides not to touch the Veena again. Her protest is like Gandhari, however this is not a weak submission but a protest in a way. She gradually grows
very strange as a person so much so that she appears to be domineering even to Devi. “In her ruthless attempts to keep these at bay, sita had built a wall of retinence around herself. This was not a wall exclude the mundane, trivial or ugly.” *(TFN: 136).*

Devi’s migration to a new place, the vast emptiness of her in-laws house, her husband’s long spells of absence, the lack of a proper companion, the death of her father-in-law and her inability to produce children lure her to Gopal in whom she imagines that she has found an ideal companion. She elopes with him, only to leave him and ultimately return to her mother. Sita is a woman who knows her mind, has clear views on what she wants to achieve. Like the stray branches of the jasmine plant she prunes in her garden, she prunes the thoughts and actions in her life to achieve what she wants to, as a girl, her ambition was to become a great veena player.

“She played so beautifully, our house hold came to a stand still as the tears streamed down our faces. Through the wetness, your father’s eyes shone with pride as they settled on that head bent over the veena, lost in concentration. She had been trained as a daughter-in-law too, of course, and she played the veena every day after she had finished her household duties.” *(TFN: 30)*
She achieves that but silences her craving for music for ever; when she pulls out the strings of her instrument and when the instrument comes in the way of her being accepted as a good wife and a good daughter-in-law. Again when her husband dies, she turns to be stoic and calm and takes control of her life. She does not let anyone to interfere with either her life or her daughter’s, this bitterness born of suppression of her feelings in her youth is latent in her psyche, so that she goes about the business of living in a prosaic manner, without tenderness. The novel ends with the encounter between the two women. A change in the behaviour of the mother suggests that, in spite of having lived all her life ‘by the book’ respecting traditions and social expectations. This mother is ready to rethink her options and establish a new degree of companionship with her daughter.

“Suitcase in hand, Devi opened the gate and looked wonderingly at the garden, wild and over-grown, but lush in spite of its sand-choked roots. Then she quickened her footsteps as she heard the faint sounds of a veena, hesitant and childlike, inviting her into the house.”

*(TFN: 139)*

Devi’s education and knowledge does not allow her life to accept the practical approach in her life and she takes the extreme step. Her education doesn’t allow her to accept the norms in the social life as she had already been disturbed
by the grandmother’s stories. She is not a passive acceptor of what life could offer, she has an inbuilt sense of revolt- a trait which she inherits from her father. Her grandmother’s stories have a profound influence on her mind. She does not accept her grandmother’s versions of Amba, Gandhari and Damayanti, the puranic women. In fact she transforms herself into an active participant; viewing them as a ‘source of over rich, unadulterated nourishment’ the stories fill her mental canvas and act as a tool of empowerment. Though she does not fully agree with her grandmother’s stories, she feels desolate when her grandmother dies. Her final union with her mother can be seen as frantic attempts of an alienated woman trying to seek a haven of shelter and security. In Devi the reader can see a modern girl who has her roots in the Hindu Tradition, the mythical stories and legends and bold enough to take her freedom.

In Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe*, there are five different women and their struggle and their search for identity is brilliantly portrayed by the vivid description of the each character. Giles Folden expresses that “Nair conveys her protagonists’ dilemmas with a freshness and charm that makes her story more than just the predictable feminist homily it might appear. She is particularly good on the domestic details such as lazy Sunday lunches, a family row, the sights, sounds and smells of a busy railway station, which make up her characters’ lives. These give her writing a sharpness and immediacy that lifts it above the common
place”(45). Five women traveling in a ladies compartment share their personal life. Among them is Akhila, single, mid-forties, and her family’s sole breadwinner. One day she seized by a nameless desire to get on to train and travel to the farthest point on the map of India, Kanyakumari. Destination to search her own desires and may be to fulfill her longings in her life. She gives in and finds herself on a train with four other women Janaki, Margaret Shanthi, Prabha Devi, and Marikolunthu. After her initial resistance Akhil begins to listen, and to tell, to chew her memories and in the process to learn. “I don’t know what Narayan anna and Nasi anna will say when they know of your going away suddenly and all by yourself too… (LC: 7)

Akhila, the protagonist of ‘Ladies Coupe’ is a victim of destiny. Her father’s sudden demise puts her in a difficult situation. Being the eldest she is expected to shoulder the family. She does her duty by helping her brother and sister to get settled in life. However no one in the family thinks of Akhila’s needs. Akhila lives a lonely life and then finds a male companion.

“Karpagam’s mother can buy her all kind of things. Karpagam’s mother has an income of her own. I can’t afford to buy you such useless things. Do you realize that Appa works so hard and in spite of it, we find it difficult to make ends meet? And I do not want you
bringing other people’s things into our home. What if you break or lose pencil? Where will I find the money to replace it?” \textit{(LC: 12)}

In Akhila’s life education does not prevail to change her mind or life, but her job and independence gave her security. She had the same thought over her mother at the age of thirteen.

“But all day and later night, Akhila thought about it. If Amma had a job, she too would have money of her own and she would be able to buy her the things she needed without troubling appa about it. But what could Amma do to earn some money?” \textit{(LC: 13)}

Akhila heard her mother singing and asked her mother to take classes for the children and could earn money for the better living. Instead her mother recollects her father’s condition before marriage that he wanted his wife to take care of him and his children and did not want her to take up a job.

“Do you think your father would allow such comings and goings on here? Don’t you know how strict he is? If I wanted a working wife, then I would have married someone like that”, he told me when we
were first married. I want my wife to take care of my children and me, and that’s all I wanted to be as well. A good wife” *(LC: 13)*

Akhila’s mother had her own theories to put forth before her daughter. She told that woman is not meant to take on a man’s role. She had her ideals to learn that woman should not prove one’s equality. She had made up her mind to accept her station in life and live accordingly. Akhila could even remember one more situation – that Amma accepted everything Appa did, When Appa sold the land inherited by Amma during her marriage with meager amount, and the land price hiked and it amounted ten times after father sold. When Akhila felt a deep sigh Amma stopped her saying that Appa’s decision was always right

“When Akhila sighed along with her, she changed her expression and said, ‘Mind you, I’m not saying that your father made a hasty decision. Who would have known that the land prices would soar so high and that too in a place like Mettupalayam?” *(LC: 51)*

Her mother is a typical woman conditioned by patriarchy. Akhila’s thought are different and she thinks about financial independence. These thoughts made her exhibit the plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions. During her journey she could encounter her fellow passengers in the ladies coupe and here she
finds an answer. Each of these females is finely drawn, each caught in a net of relationship partly of her own making – partly are that is made for her. Though they do not confess publicly, while sitting in ladies coupe, the manner in which Nair has them sharing their experiences with the protagonist Akhila shows them on the threshold of self-discovery filled with the incantatory power to see a new destination and to burn up the tracks. Nair believed “There is a lot of strength in women that does not come out naturally, it has to be forced out of them” (Nair 22). Her fellow travellers are both curious and sharing not only their tiffin but also lives with her. She was told by her fellow traveler that she must decide for herself. Initially somewhat upset she later recognizes the wisdom of this advice. First time Akhila set herself to travel alone without thinking about the destination to think upon and she could meet different types of women with different opinions – Prabha Devi, Elderly lady Janaki. At this age she thinks of herself and transforms into a new confident and feels at some point of time lost her identity. If she had been more outspoken and not waited for her family to suggest her to marry and have a family of her own. She could have avoided loneliness from choking her. When she gets a chance to enter into the sacrilege marriage she devoid it because of the society or either waited for the family. “Akhila cringed the words had hurt then. They hurt even more now. She thought of all the strange looks that had come their way as they sat in restaurants, in movie theatres, on the train. They were an
anomaly, Hari and Akhila, and nothing he said would ever change that …………

(Is: 152)

Is she waiting to get the approval of the society or the freedom to make her life complete, to fight the loneliness is the question that we have and the answer appears to be that she is hesitant to take a bold step. Even though she is not dependant she failed to come out of the society to which she has been confined for so many years, Mere economic independence is not enough to break the bondage. One should realize the ‘Self’ and should have the conviction to take the right step.

In the same novel, Prabha Devi and Margaret Paulraj tried to distinguish themselves from the society. Since they were independent and had education. Prabha Devi was born in Madras to the jewellery business man, who accepted her birth filthily. The father with a complete business mind felt that daughter is the nuisance to his business.

“Prabha Devi’s father stared down at her disapprovingly and muttered, ‘Has this baby, apart from ruining my business plans addled your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is bloody nuisance.’ (Is: 168)
Prabha Devi’s mother convinced him by telling that if she comes to the age of marriage, he could find the groom of the same business and interests. He was convinced by these words and she had the perfect childhood. She has been given proper education so that they could find out the groom of their status.

“When Prabha Devi was fifteen years old, her father moved her from the family-owned school to a convent school. The nuns were strict and as fastidious as Prabha Devi’s father expected them to be. The nuns will groom her well. Besides, if we have to find a good alliance for her, she should be able to speak proper English and look a little fashionable.” (LC: 170)

She was even permitted to go out with her friends as her father thought that she should be friendly as the grooms at the present state expected their brides quite fashionable and friendly. Prabha Devi even excelled in home making taught by her mother. Her voice had become pleasing and she walked with mincing steps, her head forever bowed, suppliant and womanly. She was married at the age of eighteen.

“But Prabha Devi’s father was not given to explaining why he did what? So in the same spirit, they accepted his decision to wed
Prabha Devi to Jagdeesh. The only son and heir of a prosperous diamond merchant. Besides, they could expand the diamond section in their four jewellery stores.” (*LC: 171*)

Every one’s aim and thought was same, Prabha Devi was educated and groomed to find out the alliance to increase their business. But her mother’s thought was different. She loved to take care of her daughter and that is her only solace in her life. So she wept quietly into the scallop-edged hanky and made everyone believe that they were tears of happiness. Prabha Devi was very much happy and almost throughout the years she waited for her husband. She was excited to know that her husband is taking her on a business trip to New-York. She has been completely perplexed by the thought of being in abroad, when she returned she was a different person.

“She brought vials of perfume, a make-up kit; lingerie frothy with artificial lace and the dreams of Taiwanese women. Knick-knacks for the home and gifts for everyone. With swinging hair and a confident stride. She admired the life of their living.” (*LC: 177*)
She admired the women’s way of living; their lives were ruled by themselves and no one else. They are poised, had confidence, a celebration of life and beauty and here she wanted to be herself.

“So she practiced the walk: an upright stance with squared shoulders, pulled in belly and a gentle but provocative swing of the hips. Then Prabha Devi discovered that a three-inch pointed heel made this whole process much easier. There was no way one could slouch wearing foot wear with stiletto heels.” (LC: 177)

She even transformed her way of dress and worried about her mother-in-law but she complimented her embroidery work in silky caftans. Her husband was worried about the change in her life style. She talks about the sex and this made him to think that he had taken a wrong decision in taking her abroad. She admired her own beauty and wanted to attract other’s attention. She doesn’t even bother whether it is man or woman but she wanted to capture the attention and that’s what happened with pramod.

“So when Pramod remained indifferent to her presence, she saw it as a slight to the person she had become. She saw him every weekend at the club where Jagdeesh played his weekly game of tennis. Prabha
Devi began to wait for Pramod. He often stopped by to chat if Jagdeesh was present.” (*LC: 180*)

The same incident changed her transformation once Pramod approached with love. He even scolded her for enticing with smiles and coy look. And then the enormity of the incident struck Prabha Devi. She then made a decision to lock away that gay spirited woman who had caused her such anguish, and she wanted to withdraw herself from life. She then became a mother and a woman who could take care of her children. She grew old and her muscles became loose. She had no other way of rejoicing except taking care of her children. But gradually she changed her outlook and discovered joy in indulging in various activities like swimming and playing Tennis. She tried to focus her thought in various activities and conquered the fear that was ruling her.

“Time ceased. A weightlessness. A haze of memorie. A cloud of unconnected thoughts. Of being and not being. From the tips of her toes to the tips of her fingers, a straight line, a slow triumph. My body no longer matters. I have this. I have conquered fear.” (*LC: 195*)
The next figure to emerge is that of **Margaret Paulraj** a chemistry teacher who reduces everything into combination of acids, alkalines and gases. She explains to Akhila that Praba Devi and Janaki were women who need support to live in the life as the climber needs support to grow and tender and soft creature to respond to their desires and willingness. “They are nice women but they are kind who don’t feel complete without man. They might say otherwise but I know them and women like them. Deep in their hearts, they think the world has no use for single woman.” *(LC: 95)*

She described herself with the Universal Solvent that is water, Water that moistens, Water that heals, water that forgets, water that accepts, water that destroys for the power to dissolve and destroy is as much a part of being the water. She hates her husband Ebenezer and watched him as he surveyed his kingdom and his cane is his scepter, where once she loved every activities of him. She streaked her thoughts to Akhila so that she would be clear whether woman could cope alone with efficiency.

“I met Ebenezer Paulraj when I was barely twenty-two years old. I was riding a wave of triumph then. The university results had been declared and I was the gold medalist for that year. ‘A gold medal in Chemistry. She was always a good student.” *(LC: 100).*
Ebenezer’s education attracted her. She was admired by Ebenezer, who was magnificent, dressed plainly and affected none of the fashions the men of my generation. He too felt the same and approached her parents and marriage was fixed with the man whom she had loved.

“You will look very good together. He, so tall and dark, and you so delicate and pretty. Like a knight and a lady,’ my aunt, who cherished Walter Scott as much as she did my uncle, whispered in my ear.” *(LC: 102)*

The whole family adored him and praised about his family as Aristocratic as there are many lawyers and professionals in the family. Her parents started advising her to keep him happy as he is much educated and sensitive. They advised her to take care of him and never should hurt him. So her life with weakened purposefulness, they beamed each other with love. After eighteen months of her married life she confirmed with pregnancy, and wanted to shout that she has become mother. Ebenezer was not happy and wanted her to get aborted.

“I’ve spoken to the doctor at length about this and she said there was nothing to fear. At seven weeks, that thing in your uterus is little
more than a zygote.’ He had made all the arrangements. All I had to do was go along.” (LC: 104)

Education or knowledge has nothing to do here; she was quiet and admissible for his ways as she loved him and was trying to accept the things happening around as she was advised by her family that she should listen and never should hurt him. She even had withdrawn her wish of doing Ph.D as he said that there is no use of doctorate, so if she could complete her B.Ed. they would always be together. She could not even let her feelings out to her parents as they respected him very much and advised her to adjust with the things as it is quite common in everyone’s life.

“Besides, there was the stigma of divorce. No one had ever been divorced in my family. What god had put together, no man or woman had cast asunder. In respectable families such as ours, no one gave up on their marriage. They grit their teeth and worked harder to preserve it.” (LC: 113)

Ebe has completely changed, things have become sour and he treated house like Hotel, he never bothered to appreciate and he had become impervious. He argued for everything and reported. He treated her as the weakest one and natural
fondness was almost evaded from her life. She was lured by love; she was in a
sense of flatness, finally she comes out of her weaknesses and submerges in her
subject, finds out the solvent to dissolve Ebe, reduced stress and revived the spirit
to act upon a man. She made him fragile with his weakness over food. ‘With
neither a sense of joy nor any pride in what the results would be. Not any more’, I
though… to, open his senses and taste buds to me….. \(IC: 132\)

She identified the man with narcissistic qualities and experimented to
dissolve him. She took a magic weapon and found the solution without the
titration and filtered his masterly appetitite with the flavour he could relish with.
She started to feed his ravenous prey with the spicy food and blotted him with the
flesh to retire himself from the feelings and made him a fragile creature to handle
easily as the puppet.

“If ebe had weakness, it was food. He loved eating the richer food,
Fatty bacon, roe filled, sardines, chicken liver, the globs of fat that
butchers threw in to make up for the bones when selling mutton,
double-yolked eggs, mangoes with cream and ripe sapodillas, puris,
fritters, chips- heavy with oil.” \(LC: 123\)
She made him a quiet man, fat man, an easy man and a man who longered for fondness for eating and tantalized his appetite and became imperative, She, riverted to his earlier self. There were no adrenaline surges; no power struggles, everything was quiet and calm, as water added to the sulphuric acid.

She recognized her need, made him to blur, blunted his razor edge tantalized his appetite for food and sex and after winning herself she made him imperative earlier to self reverted the love, tender, affection with butterfly kisses. Oil of vitriol with universal solvent splutters at first, but loses its strength, loses its bits. She doesn’t wait for the society to teach her things, and learnt tactics and tantrums by herself to revolt against him. This is indeed a melancholy-to dissipilate to use trickery, to hate and fear in silence, to learn to thwart him, to deceive him and finally she fulfills her desire in maternity, and though the child she found self-realization sexually and socially, through child bearing then, the institution of marriage get its meaning and attains its purpose.

She at last enjoys the privilege of being wholly herself. She practiced these experiences from the knowledge she has acquired, from the awareness and from the exposure towards the society by her job and independency. Thus at the end only one passenger is left with Akhila the sixth passenger she wonders what they would ever do if real tragedy confronted them. The most fascinating and most
compelling beautiful story is that of Akhila, mainly because she is in the process of discovering her own self identity also because she finally emerges as a skilled obstacle racing champion of life. As a child Akhila watched her father lionized by her mother while she and the other children were marginalized. Akhila remembers her mother’s pampering of her father with her exclusive cooking and the rhythmic movement of the swing on which her father spent the afternoons with his head cushioned in his wife’s lap. His death played an element of mystery. After the father’s death Akhila at the tender age of nineteen takes her father’s place as the sole bread winner of the family. She is not given the same sort of importance. She must have got equal pay for equal work but she certainly has not received equal respect even though the family survives only because of her. It began more as a lazy and misty blur of self-confusing thoughts but soon Akhila’s resilient self began to take form and shape. At long last her ‘entombed desires’ surfaced and decided to carve out a life of her own. She discerned her own needs and began to take care of herself. She decided to get herself an education. Akhila’s yearnings for tenderness, tough and erotic fulfillment are never vocalized. Akhila’s longings are beautifully revealed through the dream where she experienced the touch of male fingers. The personal warmth through this touch in this dreamy revelation in a strange way soothed her though it is in substantial. She is now emboldened to seek out emotional restraints in order to cater to her sensation, starved body. She encounters the first phase of tingling effect by Hari’s touch and it becomes first
phase of transition contrary to the social norm she goes to Mahabalipuram and spends time with him but the relationship dies due to social awareness. Thus Akhila’s transition into a higher stage of her evolution occurs when she decides to call of her friendship with Hari. In other sense Akhila’s decision to call off her relationship with Hari marks yet another important milestone in her evolution as an autonomous woman who is in search of ‘self’. She has found the strength to break out from the prison house of her old self as symbolized by the stiffness of the cotton saris she always wore to work. Education and employment have thus empowered women to take individual decisions boldly. Education promoted self-esteem and it gave the idea of equality. The women realized that culture is not a static, fixed entity but a confluence of beliefs and values. Depending upon the needs of the society, social rules change. The women protagonists of these novels show that as a result of education, they could never be like the women of the past. The new awareness and the new situation, gave them the right to question the existing norms and demand certain rights.