CHAPTER – IV

QUEST FOR SELF IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

The concept of identity is associated with the psychoanalytical process. It no longer confines itself to the individual but it may characterize a group, a class or even a nation. As the twentieth century is rightly called the century of ‘Alienation’ man in this century is estranged not only from his fellowmen but also from his innermost nature. He has nothing to depend upon in the moments of extreme despair. He is alone, in a crowded society. He refuses to be treated as an object and asset that he is a person. When one comes to think and speak of women novelists, one has to admit that they have a special way of looking at this concept.

Manju Kapur, as a woman, is shaped by the same environment and is a part of predominance of patriarchy. It is the confrontation of the female protagonist with the patriarchal oppressive environment, that adds more sharpness to the vision of novelist. Kapur describes how Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* with her dichotomies, marital tensions, domestic traumas undertake the quest for self identity. Manju Kapur has been a significantly sensitive woman artist who is gifted with keen observation. *Difficult Daughters* is intensely imagined, fluidly written, moving. Her theme, quest for self identity in this novel has a peculiar note of authenticity and immediacy.

Kapur says at the beginning of the novel that the historical events in novel are like imaginative reconstructions. But they are set against the backdrop of partition. At that time, India had been passing through transitional period and the Indians had to adjust themselves with changing times and now challenges. Virmati is presented as the woman of 1950s in the novel. “Virmati’s tale is told by Ida, her only daughter, who wants to reconstruct her late mother’s life-story”, (Ashok Kumar, *Novels of Manju Kapur: A Feministic Study*, p. 2). As the period demands, her society is patriarchal and she, as a woman, has been subjugated to man-made injustice and identities. Virmati’s is an affectionate upper middle class family where Virmati experiences all types of tortures and torments of life as her gender is inferior. It may be the focus of the writer to recapitulate how a woman is denied all the opportunities of social freedom in the patriarchal family set up.
Though the educational opportunities are available to Virmati, she cannot take proper advantage of it. Education offers her no guarantee for her individual growth and freedom. Freedom, in general, should be expressed as defiance of conventions and tolerance of justice in daily life. She behaves like a typical Indian woman with reliance on tradition, consideration for the individual dependence and observance of moral values. Hers is not the voice to assert her rights. The novel is like a document revealing the pain and struggle of a beautiful woman trapped and subjugated under suffocating circumstances. “Her life is smeared under the pressure of family responsibilities”, (p. 16). She registers her protest and rebellion against the prevalent male chauvinism.

As Virmati’s character is a complex one, she is unable to make up her mind what to do and what to achieve in her life. She has choices open for and her desires are multifarious. She has no idea about the priorities of her desires. Her inability to choose from these desires has created for her excruciating pain and suffering in her life. Her family name is prestigious for her and she is proud of her family root. She is happy to shoulder the responsibility of her mother and her sisters in the early years of her life. She comes to Dalhousie only to be with her mother and says, “I’m here to look after you”, (Difficult Daughters, p. 12). Her other self always cries to have more educational facilities for herself. So she wants to go to Lahore.

Shakuntala’s visit has planted the seeds of aspiration in Virmati. She rejects the marriage proposal of Indrajit. Thus, her life becomes a series of perpetual struggle against all odds as she happens to be a second wife of a Professor. Kasturi has the firm belief in the maxim, “A Woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings”, (p. 111). Virmati has been emancipated from her traditional family in Amritsar. Shakuntala mesmerized Virmati with her life style in Lahore. Virmati wants to have uninhibited existence like her. For Virmati, Shakuntala “looked vibrant and intelligent, as though she had a life of her own”, (p. 16). These seeds of aspiration have grown into a tree and Virmati tries to adopt unconventional ways. She crosses the patriarchal threshold. “She aspires a freer life than that offered by her parents. This aspiration is condemned to failure”, (Ashok Kumar, p.2). Kapur does not predict anything about the rightness of her path but her focus is to present the inner conflict engulfing Virmati’s mind after she comes to live with Harish as his co-wife.
The desire to be someone and to have a place of one’s own has been powerful in Virmati’s character. In the initial stages of the novel, it erupts like a surge now and then. She tries to escape from it and seeks refuge in the imaginative dream-world of evergreen pastures, after the better understanding of sordid reality around her. Her confusion has been endless. The early marriage or no education are the options for her. She has revolted against her marriage proposal and her sufferings increased. When she becomes aware of her attraction for the Professor, she gets the realization “to think of him was impossible, given the gulf between them until he bridged it by crying out his need”, (Difficult Daughters, p. 54).

Virmati’s attraction for Harish, her awareness of her womanly duties and her desire to be free from patriarchal shackles of Indian family these three forces work simultaneously in her life. The situation is a trying one. Different persons around her demand different things from her. Harish taught her to enjoy life; he told her how to appreciate critically art or painting. For the first time, she has understood that her love for him is not a restricting but uniting bond. It would create harmony in their life. Only she should reveal her complete self to him with all her weaknesses and her strengths. Infact, it is the spiritual odyssey for Virmati to liberate herself from orthodox conventions of traditional society towards the erotic propositions of the Professor. It is suffocating for her.

Virmati confesses her mental state to Swarnalata, her room-mate in the hostel in a vivid manner, “When Harish is here, I stop thinking of other things ……… when he is not here, all I do is wait for him to come”, (p. 140). She hates this secret relationship. There is always the sense of uncertainty, the fear to be seen by somebody. Still, the attraction for the professor and her falling a prey to his physical desires remain there. Her life continues in the same formless, endless, limitless tragic manner. She is surrounded by hollow hopelessness. Harish is not in a position to help her. Her own conflicting identities have given her trouble and grief. Her own physical lust has been responsible for her to sweep into the slippery ground of illicit love for Harish.

Kapur strongly emphasizes the plea that the worldly forces are not responsible for the protagonist to fall deep into melancholic void, but her own inner desires. The Indian woman is represented as spineless, wooden creature, traditionally. She is
subjected to male-domination. This is hostile to woman’s endeavours in such a set-up. Virmati tries to establish her identity. She is like a rebel who learns in the course of her encounter with the stark realities of life that her power is to be used cope with the male orientation. Her perplexed psyche and her traumatic experiences have tormented her. “She constantly faces emotional and physical turmoil”, (Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers, p. 258). As a consequence, she is unable to live in harmony with the environment around.

The novel is like a critical analysis of the patriarchal modes of thinking. It aims at the domination of male and the subordination of the female. The pattern of the society teaches woman to internalize the concept of subordination. But what about her self-realisation? Tradition presents the systematic attempts to silent the female and culture demands her to be feminine. Kapur, presents this struggle against victimization in her novel. “Kapur also reveals her female protagonists’ deep study of Indian culture and tradition in which they are rooted”, (p. 226). Virmati fights this battle knowing it very well that it is futile.

All the desires Virmati has and the efforts that she has made to satisfy them appear to be self delusive. She comes to Nahan as the head of the school. Her life has been silent and peaceful here. But “From time to time she felt sharp pangs of loneliness for the Professor”, (Difficult Daughters, p. 184). He does not allow her to be free. Only because of his visit her stay at Nahan has come to an end. Diwan Sahib has asked her to continue with her education, not with the job because of the gossip from the people. Virmati becomes indignant and hated herself. She travels from place to place as if running away from life.

Virmati tries to clutch life in the palms of her hands but fails to hold it. She has no power over past and present has nothing to offer her. She thinks, “How many new beginnings had her relationship with the Professor led her to?” (p. 197). The irony in the novel is all pervasive. Virmati tries to assert herself but the search remains elusive for her. She prepares herself for the task of emancipation but she knows it at the back of the mind that it is meaningless. It makes her struggle inconsequential to prove her to redefine her reality. She becomes angry at her own inadequacy and feels that her position is very much similar to the Fool in King Lear.
“Now Harish’s words echoed in her mind with an irony. He had taught her to recognize in Shakespeare’s text tragic irony, comic irony, how he had loved to expand them. Which species was this? It lacked the epic proportions of tragedy and the love courtship-marriage theme of comedy. In either case, she was the Fool, that much at least was certain,” (p. 154).

Her relationship with Harish is resulted to get pregnancy. But she has to abort the child. She is insulted as a woman and as a mother but she thinks it as the freedom from something hateful. She has the realization “Nothing was hers, not her body, her future, not even a pair of paltry, insignificant gold bangles”, (p. 174). It is hard for her to accept the disapproval of elders without questions. The free choice of education given to her has been fruitless and hollow in her case. Her emancipated existence has been equally decadent to her at Lahore and at other places. When she gets aborted, she suffers alienation at her own hands and at the hands of her lover. When she is dismissed by Diwan Sahib at Nahan, she moves from that place. By then only her friend, Swarnalata accompanies her.

It contributes in creating a void which is nothing but a chaotic feeling of loss in life. This awareness of identity crisis and consequential anxiety have been important for the existential vision of the plight of the modern woman. Virmati discovers the meaning and value of life probing through the dark mossy pathways of the soul. It is “A value charged, almost a charismatic term with its secured achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation”, (H. Dennis, Wrong Identity: Problem and Catchword, Voices of Revelation, p. 77). This search for identity is motif of Manju Kapur’s novel. Her protagonist is confused, she always runs for what she does not know.

Virmati participates in a wild race-in her educational search or in her marital adjustments. She has no clear aim in her mind. Unfortunately, she meets with disharmony and failure. The disappointments, delusions, social pressures, uncertain future make her life crump and it hurts her psyche. It justifies her cynical attitude towards established social norms and even towards life. It gives her chance to rebel against social, familial pressures. “She breaks the patriarchal norms to assert her individuality and hopes to achieve self-fulfillment,” (Ashok Kumar, p. 20). She peruses the quest for self identity. She loses her interest in everything, after she becomes the co-wife of Harish in the first year of their marriage.
Life for Virmati has become burden. She keeps the days passing. The new day is exactly the same as the old one-empty, hollow. She tries to help Guddiya in her studies in Harish’s family, but nobody wants her help. She tries to attract Giridhar showing him how to draw but the result is: “Who asked you to give trouble where you are not wanted?” (Difficult Daughters, p. 219). Really, Virmati is not wanted in the family. She has paid a visit to her parents’ house, after her marriage with Harish. She meets with rage and hostility there as if she belongs to the opposition party. Her mother says, “You have destroyed our family, you badmash, …..! you have blackened our face everywhere! (p. 221). Her new home is labelled as “Cheap dishonoured home,” (p. 221).

Virmati feels that she has no blood relations after this incident. No one comes to visit her, not even her younger sisters. She feels barren and desperate. Her ties with the family with all these care, concern, sacrifice and responsibility are all broken. When her father dies in communal riot, Virmati comes to see him but not accepted by them. “She remained on a periphery leaning sideways against the wall avoiding everybody’s eyes”, (p. 237). She is not able to meet her mother. According to the people, her marriage has killed her father. Katuri speaks of it, “Would your pitaji have gone if he didn’t have to live with the disgrace his daughter caused him?” (p. 240).

Virmati has understood it properly that it is her own mind with multiple desires to satisfy that cannot present her any solution. She tries to run away from this reality in dream world choices of her own. Her several separate roles demanding different responsibilities are for her confront. As a sister to all her siblings, she cannot satisfy them. Nobody cares for her. She has cared a lot for her family. According to her mother she has betrayed and ruined all of them, as a daughter. The members in Harish’s family do not accept her. “She finds herself in deep trouble and crisis,” (Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers, p. 231). Her education does not yield any satisfaction.

Virmati’s self remains neglected. The marriage and the bed for which she seems to have thought and craved all her life has been a thing of renunciation for her. She feels that “She is losing all sense of identity,” (Ashok Kumar, p.5)
It has been like a psychological shock for her, the thought of being unwanted at all levels. It is bound to cause quietness, loss of interest in life and psychosomatic illness due to emotional deprivation. Psychology deals at length with the after effects of being an unwanted child. If a child is not cared or loved by the parents, he/she is likely to develop deep rooted sense of fear, insecurity and rejection. Primarily the child feels the fear of being lost. It shows the disastrous effect on one’s self-esteem. As Virmati became unwanted she has lost her self-esteem. She wants to perform her duties as a wife but Ganga does not allow her to do so.

Ganga, Professor’s first wife gets the credit of doing all the things like washing his clothes, polishing shoes, making his desk clean, filling his fountain pen with ink, putting his records back in the jacket, mending his clothes, hemming his dhotis etc., Virmati is not, in that sense, a dutiful wife to do all these things. So she asks Harish with agitation, “And-what? As your wife, am I to do nothing for you? Just be in your bed?” (Difficult Daughters, p. 217). It creates a basic question about her being marginal: she is the co-wife, the second, not the first, the other. This ‘otherness’ has created a sense of frustration in her mind.

Though she is newly wedded wife, her days are not with full of enthusiasm. The days are long, empty and non-happening. She said “The day passed, empty like the day before”, (Difficult Daughters, p. 218). Virmati’s position is described very correctly in the new family by the writer. She feels blood relations barren and “she could barely understand it herself. Were all ties between herself and her family broken?” (p. 222).

Only one mistake made her cut from the family.

Another important feminist critic – Kate Millet, says man-woman relationship outside the social context, has all the attitudes and values to which culture subscribes, it is optly applicable to “Difficult Daughters”. Man plays the role of breadwinner in patriarchy. Here, Harish is in that role and he has everything at his command. He attracts Virmati with his fluent talk, smooth words and excellent manners. She is headed towards an illicit love for Harish. “Her falling in love with the Professor makes the matters worse”, (Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers, p. 231). She knows that he is a married man but she falls a prey to his seductive nature. It becomes an obsession for her slowly.
Virmati’s nature is presented as simple, innocent and docile girl at the beginning of the story. She can’t understand the subtle designs underlying the Professor’s looks and enticing talks. She admits that freely saying, “When he talked and looked like that, she could not argue further, she had to prove she trusted him”, (*Difficult Daughters*, p. 154). This failure in the proper understanding of the character of Harish brings the tragic dimension into her undisturbed life. She asked herself, “why had she been so upset to learn of Harish’s absence?” (p. 163).

Virmati’s association with the Professor and her life do not allow her any ordinary options open for any ordinary girl and acceptable to the norms of the society. She gets frustration due to her situation and it is like a trauma for her. It is a feeling of her that she is going to fall into an abyss without having any upward paten to walk towards freedom. She thought, “within a few minutes, she was going to their house, to be presented as his second wife, panic set in & her palms began to sweat”, (p. 207). As she happens to be the ‘second’ wife of the Professor, there are full of odds and difficulties with perpetual struggle in her life.

The novel is set in the patriarchal pattern of society. In India this social system is a decisive factor in man-woman relationship. Virmati is not allowed in this social set up to be open and frank about her love with Harish. She has neither permission nor the courage to assert her relationship with the Professor openly. “When her grandfather Lala Diwan Chand comes to know about her affair with the Professor, she is locked in the godown”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 17). The continuity of the novel is maintained throughout ultimate goal in the life of Virmati, it automatically gears up the thought, that it is the ultimate bonanza for Virmati but not relationship of equality.

There is no communication involved in it. Harish’s actions both before and during love making are so typical that Virmati comes to understand the real nature of him. She can predict his reactions. He always pleads his own case with the same argument “What can I do? I am hemmed and tortured on all sides. I know I have been unfair to her I know. And yet what can I do?” (*Difficult Daughters*, p, 201). It is this helplessness that creates sympathy in the mind of Virmati for him. Communication ends with the intercourse in their relationship. Virmati turns desparate about what should she do afterwards? What should be the end of all these illicit meetings before marriage and even after it, what is her position in the new house? The questions remain unanswered. “The consequences for Virmati are harsh indeed,” (Ashok Kumar, p. 2).
She tries to express her fear to Harish but no result. It creates monotony, fear, frustration. They become forceful elements from outside in the world of sex. They affect the sexual behaviour of Virmati. The woodenness and neutrality are the best representations of this sexual politics even within the first year of her married life. Due to this Virmati is made passive, submissive and compromising. It may appear biological, the sexual act on the surface, but it is not so. It is deeply set in larger context of human affairs in reality. Virmati may try to forget her difficulties while enjoying the sexual act by shutting her eyes. It is symbolic as she wants to remain aloof from the harsh realities of the harsh world. But these realities cannot leave her free. They always haunt her and “she leads a suffocating life in the tight walls of the house”, (p. 19).

The argument put forth by Greer is that natural differences between men and women that are exaggerated due to social factors. ‘Woman is a social construct but devised by man’, as per the thesis of Simon de Beauvoir. As woman designed by society she tries hard to fit herself in the social model. She slowly loses her natural human qualities in this process. Kapur’s Virmati tries to fit herself to a model evolved for her by the society. She has sacrificed her education, given up her career and left her ancestral home only to be on the periphery. On the other hand, Harish never has a wrinkle on his forehead nor has he any tension to be seen clearly. Though Harish interrupted Virmati she does not try to register a single word of complain against him. It has a symbolic importance. As for Virmati it is a negation of her own existence. It can be called as a conscious sacrifice of her identity as anything except Harish’s ‘Second’ wife. “She made a wrong choice in choosing the Professor as life partner,” (Ashok Kumar, pp. 3-4). She pays no attention to the outside world nor even to her own life or health.

Women are more forgiving, more kind and more holy in “Difficult Daughters”. They are not much interested in material and physical pleasures. Though Virmati involves herself in illicit relationship, she is forgiving in the heart of her heart. Virmati’s illicit love attraction can be thought as the new desire of a new woman discussed in the book of Betty Friedman. It may be the part of corruption of modern life. Men are self-centred in the novel. There is no transformation to be brought in their nature.
The married life of women is exhausting and difficult but they are not courageous enough to admit this. They do not achieve self-fulfillment. They are mature enough like Kasturi and Kishori Devi but not having self-satisfaction. The women are shown as traditional picture in the novel “but Virmati the epitome of modernity, tries to break the trammels of traditions”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 11). They are all the part of a wheel of life run not by them but by the heads of the families, their male-partners. If women are given chance for self fulfillment, they can become stronger and are ready to fight all obstacles.

As an example, Virmati goes against the system and decides to fight in order to realize her suppressed potential. “Education gives her strength in achieving some level of freedom from the shackles of patriarchy”, (Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers, p. 256). But she admits that she is responsible for the perpetual of patriarchy. She emerges not as a hapless, helpless weak figure looking for sympathy and support but as a capable, intelligent and self respecting young woman. She realizes the patterns of society and threads of patriarchy. She makes constant efforts to be aware of her dormant capacities. It is like an awakening in herself.

Virmati’s decisions are bold. Betty Friedman presents the problem of stunting of growth of a woman in the patriarchal framework of society and it is at the pivotal position in the novel. Once Virmati falls in love with Harish, tries to achieve this boon. She does not have anything as the balanced thought to have the understanding about the pros and cons of the problem. Virmati tries to educate and enlighten herself. “She manages to Leave home to study in Lahore, insisting on her right to be educated”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 2). Here she becomes the victim of illicit love and has lost the capacity even to think.

It has been really a Herculean task going against the social conventions. Against all odds Virmati becomes the co-wife of Harish. Her condition is really pathetic in facing all her humiliations and sufferings to be a wife of Harish. The doors of happiness are closed for her. It seems she, herself has closed them. To be a second wife her humiliation is yet to be neutralized and her identity is yet to be crushed.
Virmati has made many new beginnings and has visited many new places. Now the time has come in her life when the ray of hope is lost. She wants to be stronger, she wants to assert and to “forge her identity,” (Difficult Daughters, p. 198). But it is not possible for her.

Virmati is fully aware of the fact that life in the patriarchal set up is really difficult. Here in every decision the last word comes from the male partner. It is a tragic vision of Virmati’s married life. “Though she succeeds in marrying the Professor, she does not secure any space for herself in the family”, (Ashok Kumar, pp. 18-19).

Kapur delves deep into the unconscious as well as the conscious mind of Virmati. She is projected as highly sensitive and so she cannot face the crude realities of life. She tries to cross the conventional boundaries of Indian family life. “She has courage to fight against male chauvinism for her right of choosing her mate in life”, (p. 20). She reverts the rule of married life and becomes the co-wife. She remains on the border line of dissatisfaction with her life.

Virmati wants to participate in freedom-struggle, in the later part of the novel. She is not allowed to do so as Harish wants her to pay more attention to their baby. The daughters naming ceremony takes place. Virmati wants to call the daughter ‘Bharati’ as it is associated with the birth, of the country. Harish suggests the name ‘Ida’, Virmati tells him that it sounds Persian. But Harish justifies saying “Let anybody think what they like. For us it means a new slate and a blank beginning”, (Difficult Daughters, p. 277). The man who talks of freedom of country, in practice, does not allow the same to his wife. To give a name to a child seems a trivial matter in that consideration.

Manju Kapur delineated the dilemma of the protagonist suffering consistently because of her trapping in illicit love. She is alienated from her roots and it is the cause of her identity-crisis. She wants to achieve equality and dignity. The voyage of her own liberation has created irrevocable lines of hostility, pain and suffering around her. “She has to face different twists and turns due to her desire of higher education”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 16).
Virmati is clear about her identity in the initial stages of her life. She becomes confused as time passes. Her desire to achieve equality in the patriarchal Indian society proves to be a delusion for her. She meets her desires fully shattered. Her life becomes more dark and clouded for her. Her quest for self identity has been a dominant preoccupation in her mind and she tries to articulate her cry for her existential equality.

If the heroine of Manju Kapur’s first novel *Difficult Daughters* shook the foundations of her conservative Punjabi joint family with her rebelliousness and her unsuitable marriage, then Astha the heroine of *A Married Women*, acquiesces meekly to her parent’s plans for her future. The novel traces the adolescence and early adulthood of the protagonist through her unquestioning acceptance of the role chosen for her, that of a married woman, set in present day New Delhi. Despite two children, a dutiful husband and an enviable lifestyle, Astha experiences a lack of validation within the marriage. Then her rebellion comes out. Her quest for an autonomous identity, which blossoms as the result of her confidence is predicated on her artistic talent.

Asth a finds a facet of her self in fighting against communal violence which gives her a sense of power. She eventually returns to her family, ensuring that her life follows the conception of feminity found in the dominant Indian tradition. Roop Rekha Verma outlines the symbolism and iconography relating to the theme of feminity in Hindu mythology which ranges from Sita, the epitome of unquestioning self-sacrifice, to Kali, the goddess of power. Yet this variety seen in mythological imagery is missing from the actual theories of feminity which display the stereotypical view of woman as weak and vulnerable. Though this narrow conception of feminity is prevalent throughout the world, its stereotype has cuts across cultural difference.

Analysis of the pronouncements regarding women in the Manusmriti and the Dharma shastras reveal the extolling of the feminine virtues of self-negation. This causes woman to take pride in their subjugation and resist change. Roop Rekha Verma feels that.

“Women have been moulded by the ethics of self-negation generation after generation and take pride in being …… the custodians of themselves as placed on a
very high pedestal from which they can hardly dare step down……” (Feminity, Equality and Personhood, p. 439).

Over time this positioning of women is the result of cultural conditioning and can be contrasted with an entirely different form, which is more capable of social participation and responsibility, this claim for equality has its own drawbacks. A hitherto unrecognized aspect of the role assigned to women is that such claims to equality often deprive her of qualities that distinctively belong to womanhood, and further more deny her full personhood as well.

Vrinda Nabar also emphasizes the hold of tradition and mythology on the Indian subconscious in her analysis of the Indian caste system from a feminism perspective. She points to the incongruence in the use of mythological stereotypes like Sita and Draupadi to uphold present day ideals of female perfection and purity. Kane cities a first century law giver Brihaspati’s definition of the devoted wife, the pativrata: “She is someone whose state of mind reflects that of her husband. She shares his distress, his delight, grows sickly and dresses unattractively in his absence and dies when he does”, (Vrinda Nabar, Caste as Woman, p. 567).

Nabar asserts that the total emotive and spiritual immersion in the husband’s being may not operate in most marriages today. Yet there is something in it which is endemic to the Hindu world view of the self effacing role of the wife. Such expectations often defeat the Indian woman’s attempts to achieve an autonomous identity.

Roop Rekha Verma considers three qualities as essential for an entity to be categorized as a person: “autonomy, self respect and a sense of achievement and fulfillment, (Feminity, Equality and personhood, p. 440). An autonomous individual lives in harmony with the “other” in society. The purposes of his or her life are shaped by his or her own experiences, interests and capacities. Self respect involves a sense of dignity, consciousness of autonomy and worth. A sense of fulfillment and achievement is possible only for an autonomous person. It is clear from this definition that personhood is generally denied to the Indian women.
The conditions of her life preclude any possibility of developing self-respect or achieving autonomy. As a result, she rarely attains selfhood or even gains knowledge of her supposed goals and desires. The genre most clearly associated with women’s writing is the narrative of female self-discovery in which the refusal of the heterosexual romance plot provides access to self-discovery and self-knowledge. Rita Felski states that “the presence of such a symbolic act of separation as a defining feature of women’s right to a social identity, delinked from her maternal and sexual role. It has become embedded within the discursive frameworks of contemporary culture, giving rise to Hitherto unseen narratives of separation and self-discovery”, (Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, p. 126).

The self-discovery narrative delineated by Felski owes allegiance to certain forms of racial feminism, a kind of politics that places emphasis upon creating qualitatively different relationships between the self and other individuals as a means of overcoming the alienated nature of modern thought and experience. The evidence of underlying affinities between contemporary women’s writing and particular forms of feminist ideology does not necessarily imply that the ideology can be imputed to the author of the literary text as a political position. Literary and political domains interact with each other reflecting general trends within society. However, Felski’s assertion that the narrative of self discovery functions as an ideological site, a process of meaning production, may require some modification in the Indian context.

The overwhelming importance given within Indian society to the norms of feminity set down in the ancient Indian texts like the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Dharmashastras have ensured the limitation of the female self-discovery mode to a temporary separation and ultimate recuperation into the sexual and maternal role. The western feminist novel of self-discovery typically begins at stage when the traditional plot of women lines breaks off, with the attainment of a male sexual partner. Such a text is defined by “the rejection of the heterosexual romance plot characterized by female passivity, dependence and subordination and an attempt to develop an alternative narrative framework …… within which female identity can be located,” (Rita Felski, p. 129).
Rita describes the typical pattern of self-discovery which begins with: “A negative model, an image of female alienation. The restrictive nature of female social roles is often exemplified in the emblematic figure of the housewife whose entire horizon is circumscribed by the daily drudgery of catering to her family’s domestic and emotional needs. The sexual division of labour ensures the asymmetry of power in male-female relations. Women’s confinement to the familial circle denies them the potential for autonomous, self-fulfilling activity while trapping them into a relationship of psychological or economic dependence upon a lover who is unable to validate women other than in relation to his own emotional and sexual interests,” (p. 129).

An internalization of this view of a woman’s role by the protagonist often leaves her with a self-image based solely on her relation to the needs of others. The lack of any base from which count patriarchal ideology is often manifested as a sense of hopelessness and ennui. It is from this alienated stage that the most significant transformation of the protagonist takes place. The self-discovery narrative at this stage moves beyond the “euphoric” or “dysphoric” plots of eighteenth and nineteenth century novels described by Nancy Miller.

The alienation of the female protagonist leads to death or defeat but provides an impetus for a sustained reputation of patriarchal values. These plots focus on a form of opposition through the resistance and survival of the heroine. The unequal structures of power governing relationships between men and women leads to the female protagonists search for an alternative psycho-social space; the protagonist leaves the husband or lover and chooses to live alone or with other women, some form of separation from traditional heterosexual relationship deeply implicated within patterns of domination and subordination.

The emphasis on autonomy is balanced by a reduction in the dominance of sexuality, for erotic passion can sabotage the protagonist’s struggle to strengthen a precarious independent identity. Felski states that “lesbian relationships are an important exception to this rule, their significance in the text being determined by their narrative function in furthering the protagonist’s intellectual and emotional self-understanding”, (p. 131).
With the rejection of the heterosexual couple as a means to self definition, the protagonist must establish alternative symbolic configurations to serve as a locus of meaning. Nature and the female community are the two motifs which recur frequently. Both complement and extend the protagonist’s sense of self rather than threaten it by absolute otherness, and thus provide framework where a gendered identity can be located. The self-discovery narrative tends to focus upon the process of psychological transformation as opposed to an exploration of its social implications, in order to encourage the process of empathy and identification with the protagonist.

The closure in such narratives is usually deferred, allowing for future negotiations between the subject and society. Contemporary narratives resist such endings, whereas eighteenth and nineteenth century novels confront social possibilities and answer them with finality. The fact that such choices are open to the heroine of the contemporary self-discovery narrative reveals the reality of ideological pluralism and is exemplified in the narrative strategies used by contemporary women writers.

Asta, the protagonist of *A Married Woman*, seems at first to be completely oblivious to such oppositional strategies and feminist protests. She meekly goes along with her parent’s plans for her eventual marriage in the very picture of adolescent docility. As Astha born into a middle class conservative family, she does nothing to upset the status quo. Astha’s scholarly father is more open minded. He is a far more of feminist than her, encouraging her to explore new intellectual vistas. But her religious, conservative mother establishes the opposite point of view, insisting on the importance of tradition. “Though Astha belongs to a typical middle class family, she breaks the chain of her traditional family”, (Ashok Kuamr, p. 77).

She is happy to follow the plan charted out for her future, but she is more sexually experienced than her parents imagine, having indulged in adolescent flings with a neighbour and a college friend. But these are firmly brushed aside when the proposal arrives. The only son of an affluent bureaucrat, a foreign-return MBA who had been attracted by Ashta’s placid and compliant nature is the suitor. Marriage and sexual fulfillment soon follow with Hemant and he proves to be a caring and progressive spouse initially. She feels, “her marriage with Hemant fulfills her girlish dreams”, (p. 77). Perhaps Hemant’s most enlightened moment is longing for a first born baby, wishing to lavish love and care on her.
Predictably, next Astha has a son and her perfect family is completed. Concentrating on his television business Hemant leaves Astha and the baby Himanshu completely alone. Meanwhile Astha had begun work as a school teacher and this provides her with some respite from domestic drudgery. But being virtually a single mother as well as a perfect wife and a career woman extra burden is placed on her. She begins to experience severe headache due to stress of such life. Inspite A variety of medical treatments including surgery, the headache refuses to go away, providing a clue to a split between the protagonist’s inner and outer selves. Astha’s only respite from her suffering is her poetry, which she dabbled in from her early youth:

“Writing alleviated the heaviness within her, a heaviness she found hard to deal with. Discussing her feelings with Hemant usually led to argument, distance and greater misery. She found temporary relief in the struggle to express herself”, (A Married Woman, p. 79). Her writing shocks Hemant who is allowed a brief glimpse into her psyche for the first time. Replete with images “of cages and birds, and mice, and suffering in situations that are not even clear” (p. 81), they are emblematic of Astha’s inchoate feelings of despair.

A斯塔 begins to experience a sense of remoteness from her destiny, which she feels helpless to alter, a situation clearly indicative of the split between the inner and outer self posited by Rita Felski. It is from this sense of alienation that Astha’s quest for self-discovery begins, providing an impetus for a sustained refutation of repressive Hindu traditions. A repository of these values in Ashta’s mother who had been widowed soon after her daughter’s marriage. Her widowed status precipitates a turn towards fervent religiosity which culminates in her ultimate relocation to an ashram in Rishikesh.

Ashta’s mother entrusts her money to Hemant, something which enrages the daughter. This reveals an important theme, the asymmetry of power within the marriage with Astha having virtually no control over her own inheritance. “A斯塔 suffers humiliation and exploitation by the elders, and society,” (Ashok Kumar, pp. 56-57). She is poised for rebellion, a symbolic separation from traditional social and familial frameworks, when she meets Aijaz Khan, a theatre activist. Aijaz is a tonic to Astha’s shriveled self-esteem, believing in her ability to write a play on the Babri Masjid issue. She sees her efforts transformed into a successful stage production, which had she added bonus of featuring her daughter Anuradha and her son Himanshu in the cast.
Aijaz appreciates Astha as an individual with a talent of writing and sketching, an autonomous person, not only in her social context as a wife and mother. “Suddenly, she glimpsed possibilities, suddenly her life seemed less constricted,” (A Married Woman, p. 115). The friendship provides Astha with a glimpse of an alternate life, one not structured by dominance and subordination. The validation from Aijaz does not continue for long, for he is killed soon after in a horrific act of communal violence.

Shocked by Aijaz’s murder, Astha gets involved with the Sampradayaka Mukti Manch whose leader, Reshanna is committed to fight religious fundamentalism. Ashta’s quest for autonomy begins in earnest with the Manch commissioning her to create a painting to be sold as part of its fundraising efforts. Despite being ravaged by her headaches, and having to be consoling spouse to Hemant, who has experiencing labour trouble at his factory, Astha steadfastly pursues her painting. Despite pressure from various directions, mainly Hemant and her excruciating headaches, Astha preserves in her quest for something of her own, her own money-symbolic of her deeply-felt need for economic independence.

Asta sells her painting for ten thousand rupees, an occurrence that leaves her simultaneously exhilarated and wary. She downplays her achievement to her daughter, there by ensuring the continuity of repressive traditions into the next generation: “She wanted to say Yes, I have done it, I have sold my first painting, I have achieved something, let us celebrate, but the number of ‘I’s’ involved ensured that the words refused to leave her mind,” (p. 150). The words reveal Astha’s lack of assertiveness and more tellingly the demigration of independent identity, an inability of utter “I”.

Torn between her desire to be a dutiful, loving wife to Hemant and her increasing self-confidence as a painter, Astha remains indecisive. It takes a botched holiday in Goa for her to move towards acknowledging her dissatisfaction with her circumscribed life. From the beginning, the holiday trip had been completely Hemant’s idea, with Astha’s earnings from her painting contributing towards the airfare. The trip is a night mare for her, marred by her debilitating headaches and Hemant’s constant sexual demands. Her troubles reach an apotheosis when she sees a beautiful, antique silver box she wishes to possess.
Despite her money providing the airfare, he is contemptuous of her earnings, refusing to entertain her wishes even for a moment, as the box becomes a symbol of her powerlessness within the marriage. The split between her inner need for validation and her outer role as a wife and mother is complete. But “she suffers from a sense of incompleteness, repression and anguish”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 76). The powerful estrangement she experiences is manifested in a bout of nausea and particularly bad headache. When she returns to her school, her colleagues commiserate with her about her haggard appearance, advocating the well-trodden path of sacrifice.

Asta reacts with despair, speaking out against such repressive Hindu customs. But she quickly retracts her statement on seeing the shocked faces of her colleagues. Astha’s tentative steps towards independence begin with her trip to Ayodhya. Travelling with the other members of the Manch, she is overwhelmed by the force of religious fundamentalism. She speaks at a rally about the need for a female response to such violence, a need to consider the effects of violence on women. She meets Pipeelika, Aijaz Khan’s widow, at Ayodhya. Pipee has a major impact on Ashta’s quest. Ashta and Pipee form an instant friendship, a bond with shattering consequences for Astha’s marriage.

The beginning of the end of Astha’s marriage, founded upon her sacrificing her own identity while trying to satisfy the traditional duties of a Hindu wife, coincides with the events leading up to the Babri Masjid demolition. As Anita Nair comments: “The key to the plot is the Babri Masjid episode. If one is looking for a metaphor, here it is. A nation falling apart because of differences that can’t be bridged. A family falling apart because of differences that can’t be bridged, (A Boaring Woman, p. 84). But Manju Kapur’s use of history is less than effective. She is far better when exploring the psyche of Astha and tracing her evolving subjectivity.

If Astha’s lesbian affair with Pipeelika was a prelude to her achieving an autonomous identity, it is far from successful. Her affair with Pipee, Aijaz’s widow, is narrated in a first person diary format to set it apart from the omniscient third person narration used in the rest of the book. This narrative technique is possibly used to provide a glimpse into Astha’s innermost feelings, but these are revealed to be mere confusion. Pipee is as controlling as Hemant, with Kapur merely exchanging a lover of
one gender for another. Nilanjana S. Roy observes, “Pipee’s gender is almost irrelevant, except as a convenient plot device. Her role in the relationship is masculine, classically butch. Change the ‘she said’ to ‘he said’ and surprise, it’s conventional man-woman relationship”, (She said, He said, p. 80). The relationship breaks down irrepairably after Astha’s trip with her family to Disney World and London.

Pipee decides to go to America to pursue her Ph.D., and Astha goes back to her old life. But there is a difference, as Astha continues her paintings and finds an outlet for her pent-up rage. Perhaps her developing artistic talents consciously prefigure her greater autonomy within her marriage. There are numerous examples of western texts that conform to the pattern of the self-discovery narrative with the woman’s separation from her family symbolizing her emerging subjectivity. The paucity of such narratives among Indian novels is perhaps testimony to the strength of traditional familial bonds outlined in the epics and the Dharmashastras.

The effects of such bonds are seen in the repression endured even in a “normal” relationship, reflected in Astha’s quandary. It is essential at this point to sound a cautionary note. As Roop Rekha Verma clarifies, “Hindu culture cannot be equated with Vedic culture as it is far more complex. However, the conception of feminity is almost constant in the mist of this plurality. The culture that arose from the later Vedic literature has influenced other cultures in India and these do not differ much in their perspectives on women. In Indian culture, a woman is seen only as an auxiliary to man”, (Feminity, Equality and Personhood, p. 443).

The virtues required in a wife are completely self-negating, self-sacrifice, tolerance and submission. It is in the light of these repressive notions that the Indian woman’s difficulty in achieving autonomy in her quest for self-discovery should be viewed. Rita Felski outlines, “….. the conflicting tendencies underlying oppositional social movements: a desire for integration with the larger social community as a means of overcoming a condition of marginalization and an instance upon the qualitative difference of cultural perspective as a means of articulating a challenge to dominant values and institutions, a stress on difference which resists assimilation into the main stream of social life,” (Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, p. 150).
It would appear that for Hindu women the desire for integration emerges stronger, as seen from the narrative resolution chosen by Manju Kapur in *A Married Woman*. The novel is unable to oppose the authority of a version of female experience that nullifies female autonomy, inspite of rejecting the notion of a completely self-negating Hindu wife. It presents an alternative version with the potential for inspiratory status, proceeding on the assumption that autonomy within a Hindu marriage is not an impossible concept. In the final analysis, perhaps the clue to Astha’s future autonomy lies in the meaning of her name, hope. Astha’s return to her marital home and her children may be founded on her hope and a vision of future empowerment and autonomy.

Manju Kapur’s *Home* explores the complex terrain of the Indian family reveals many issues that are deep rooted within the family revolt against the age-old traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage; and lastly the women’s struggle for her survival. Unlike Shobha De’s women, who are quite dreamy and who run after Hollywood and Bollywood, Manju Kapur’s protagonist in the present novel lives within the sphere of reality and successfully finds her ‘Home’.

The novel presents Manju Kapur’s understanding of human characters and her maturity as a novelist. In this context it is observed that “Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress”, (Anupama Chowdhury, *Manju Kapur’s Home: A Feminist Reading*, 2008:33). It explores the protagonist Nisha’s quest for identity and survival. Nisha refuses to reconcile with the patriarchal and male governed society and tries to establish her own individual identity.

Since the establishment of the society, woman is stamped as the weaker sex, denied full justice, social security, economic liberation, and political awareness. As Beauvoir comments, “the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all creatures nevertheless finds herself in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other,” (*The Second Sex*, 1986:167). But the Women Liberation Movement of 1960’s helped women to think over their condition and treatment of equality along with men. Manju Kapur’s *Home* encapsulates the idea of women’s liberation and the protagonist Nisha emerges as a new woman in the novel.
Earlier in various socio-cultural situations, women were discriminated more on the bias of sex. Hence, Kapur comments: “……This is the life of a woman to look after her home, her husband, her children and give them food she has cooked with her own hands”, (Home, p. 126). This has been in practice with women as their duties to owe domesticity under the pressure of patriarchal notions (system) and controls, where as Betty Friedan’s *the Feminine Mystique* questions why is a woman in a patriarchal system confined to domesticity and childcare. She observes: “For woman, as for man, the need for self fulfillment-the autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization-is as important as the sexual need…..” (Friedan, 1971:282).

Manju Kapur’s novels reveal the life of women, their struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival. With education they become aware of their self-reliance which is proved in concern with new women. Now they have considerable freedom of expression and thoughts. In each and every field they shoulder with men and work. Women had the same freedom in ancient India, especially in vedic period. They were equally footing with men. Even they had right to choose their husbands especially with the announcement of Swayamwara.

In this context it may be mentioned about Seeta in Ramayana and Droupadi in Mahabharata. They were worshipped as Goddesses like Durga, Parvati and Lakshmi. The condition of women changed in the medieval period and the difference between men and women become vital. Alen and Barbara in their essay, “Why Men Don’t Listen and Women Can’t Read Maps” say: “All things are not equal, men and women are different. Not better or worse-different,” (Allen and Barbara, pp. 3-5). So, women were suffering from economic and socio-cultural disadvantages in the male governed society.

The society was patronized by patriarchy. The women were silent and remained only as rubber dolls for others to move as they wanted. They had been deprived of their basic rights, their aspirations to their individuality and self-reliance. The life of women was difficult before and recently even after Industrial Revolution in European countries. In India, besides several restrains of gender, tradition and orthodoxy of religion, Indian women today are victims of crimes like physical and mental torture, sexual harassment, rape and dowry killing etc. It is observed that in modern India the
situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on
struggling against the burden of tradition, against the legacy of the past and the
orthodoxy of patriarchal system,” (Clara Nubile, *The Danger of Gender*, p. 271).

Though it is true there is another observation in regarding that “the modern
woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her. The new
woman dares to pronounce her volitions and convictions,” (Kanwar Dinesh Singh,
*Feminism and Post Feminism*, p. 12).

The novel *Home* is a portrayal of Nisha, as a new woman, a more assertive, self-
assured and confident one. She proclaims her womanhood in a bold manner by equally
footing with men. She applies her power to work as a business woman being a young
college girl. There is a comment that her quest for identity is a, “whole new look at
women-not as the property of father, husband or son…..” (Nayanatara Schgal,
*Women’s Liberation – The Indian Way*, Sunday Standard, 21st March). And she is
really the representative of new women in the millennium.

Manju Kapur’s novel, *Home* takes us through a brisk and strangely captivating
account of three generations i.e., the first generation of Lala Banwarilal, the second of
his two sons, and the third of his grand children. The first generation of Lala Banwari
Lal, head of the family, runs a sari business in Karol Bagh, Delhi, where he settles after
partition of India. Banwari Lal has two sons – Yeshpal and Pyarelal and a daughter
Sunita, who already married and has a son Vicky. Yeshpal marries with Sona and
Pyarelal marries with Sushila, “the family tree, as drawn by the writer, clearly mentions
the home’ of the Banwari Lals,” (Ashok Kumar, p. 39). Sona’s sister Rupa is the wife
of an educated but badly paid government servant, Premnath.

Both the sisters are hard workers, good at heart and live with their in-laws in the
same area. All are the members of the next generation to Banwari Lal. After an
accidental death of Sunita her only son Vicky is taken to Karol Bagh, Delhi from
Bareilly. As Sona does not conceive for a long time, her mother-in-law assigns to her
the responsibility of Vicky. Meanwhile Sushila gives birth to Ajay. Sona feels her life
has been misery and she is always taunted by Maji for not bearing a child”,
(*Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers*, p. 129). She keeps fasting for

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a long time for the want of a child but it helps her in no way. So Yeshpal plans to visit a shrine at Chetai near Almora. It is believed that the Goddess of this mountain is very powerful. Rupa and Premnath also accompany them.

After two months Sona comes to know that she has conceived. Soon she gives birth to a girl ‘Nisha’. When her horoscope is matched, she is declared as Mangli. After Nisha, Sona gives birth to a son Raju. Meanwhile Sushila gives birth to her second son Vijay. So including Vicky, Ajay, Vijay and Raju are the representatives of the third generation. In the early part of the novel Nisha, in her infancy phase, falls a prey to the carnal desires of Vicky, a fifteen year boy and her kin. Vicky tries to seduce her. It affects her psychologically and mentally. She is sent to Rupa’s home for a change. They try to tell her stories from Ramayana and even try to admit her in better school. This very incident reminds one the movie Monsoon Wedding. This also reminds one of William Golding’s Lord of the Files, where he points out that Children are no more innocent and they possess the instinct of elders.

Yeshpal the elder son in the family shoulders the responsibilities after the death of Banwari Lal. Nisha also returns home to accompany her grandmother. Soon Ajay’s marriage takes place and then Vijay’s. As Nisha is mangli destined to match her horoscope with a similar mangle, she should wait unless a mangli could find. Ultimately Nisha is at the centre of interest with an issue of her college education. After a dialogue with Sona, Rupa an emerging new woman interposes:

“If anything happens in the girl’s later life, she is not completely dependent”, (Home, p. 140). She continues in a careful emotional manner: ‘It would be shame not to educate her further. Let her do English Honour, not too much work reading story books”, (p. 141).

She becomes convinced that there is no discrimination made as male and female in the context of education. Nisha joins Durga Bai College. She has the only best friend Pratibha, an ambitious girl in the college. Pratibha joins NCC programme hoping that this would lead to a Government job with the police. Pratibha as a new woman also wants to create her own identity and an independent existence in the economic field.
She deserves to be mentioned as active, confident and thorough like Nisha. Nisha meets Suresh, a student of Khalsa College of Engineering on the way to college.

After their few meetings, Pratibha makes Nisha aware asking the details about Suresh, That is his name, caste, family background etc and says: “If you are going to be modern girl you have to be through”, (p. 146). Nisha just pretends and says: “You think girl and boy can’t be friends” (p. 147). In her view she is enough modern. She does not discriminate biologically. To be friends, they are equal beings. Nisha and Suresh fall in love with each other after many meetings. Nisha becomes such a bold girl to wander here and there, roam the University lawns, sipping coffee in coffee houses with Suresh. It becomes her routine. She cuts her hair on his suggestion like Suria, a famous film star of the days. But she is really attentive at her studies.

When exams are around corner, she worries; “I can’t meet you. I have to study, I have to get second division atleast”, (p. 152). Suresh helps her with St. Stephens Tutorials which results in securing first division. It surprises all. The courtship continues into its second winter. Now Nisha certain of her ability to do well begin to miss even more classes. In her quest to establish her own and separate identity, she becomes more adventurous in her clothing, altering her Salwar Kameez with jeans and T-shirts, by the end of second year. She becomes a forwarded girl in her appearance and temperament.

By now she is in third year and her affair with Suresh begins to comment upon. She asks Suresh: “When is your family going to approach mine with proposal?” (p. 187). In the course of their discussion, Nisha drags off behind Suresh at Vijay Nagar in a special room, where she keeps her chastity showing maturity. She says: “It is just as well there is something left for when we are married”, (p. 192). Her parents receive a letter about her short of attendance in college from the authorities towards the end of third year.

Nisha’s affair with Suresh comes into lime light. She has to face many querries. She wants to meet Suresh only once. But her brother Raju calls him a crude fucker. Nisha is not trustworthy in his opinion. So, she rebels: “Who are you to decide whether I am trustworthy”? (p. 199). This rebellion comment reflects her modernity. She wants
to live on equal footing with men, creating her own identity. She refuses to admit any
discrimination between men and women. Her rebellious nature arises from time to time.

On the other hand, Suresh tries to convey her family that his intentions are pure
and he only wants Nisha. No dowry, no fancy wedding, he doesn’t even care if she is
mangli. On account of this, Nisha is moved by his nobility. “But two things pose a
great problem before her family – caste and poverty”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 43). She says
her mother “Who cares about caste these days? What you really want is to sell me in
the market”, she sobbed with indignant emotion. “Sell me and be done with it. What are
you waiting for?” (Home, p. 200) Nisha refuses to follow the age-old traditional
marriage. She wants no more to be a doll to be sold in the market.

Nisha’s quest for identity and freedom as a human being significantly expresses
Manju Kapur’s feminist approach. According to Silpi Srivastava, Nisha’s desire for
establishing self identity is, “a value charged, almost a charismatic term with its
secured achievement regarded as equivalent personal salvation”, (Amarnath Prasad,
New lights on Indian Women Novelists in English, p. 197). Nisha’s views irritate her
mother and she gives her a slap. And she is made a prisoner in her own family. When
she repents at her uncle premnath, he consoles: Suresh’s family should have met your

Later they hold meetings with Suresh. But those prove to be fatal for Nisha. She
realizes: “Raju is right; Suresh is a Chutia, a total fucker, if he loves her, he has no right
to decide her future on his own”, (p. 215). Significantly enough Manju Kapur, here, has
pointed out the traditional mole governed approach. Though Suresh loves Nisha, he
wants to decide her future on his own’. During this time, Nisha attempts third year
exam and secures third division.

Now Suresh vanishes from her life and there is nothing she can do. She just
leaves her fate in the hands of her parents ‘becoming a bird in a cage’ and to adjust with
the idea of another man in place of Suresh. Here starts discussion on her marriage issue
all around. She feels tortures about viewing process. In her attempt to survive, she
wants to do something meaningful. She dares to complain, “I don’t want to be seen by
all these people, why can’t I do some course”? (p. 226). Then, “armed with a college
degree, she tests new avenues and ultimately finds her own niche,” *(Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers, p. 132).*

Nisha declares, “I want to study fashion designing. Lots of girls do it, why can’t I? She doesn’t want to stay at home being an English graduate. Instead she thinks about career oriented courses. By this time, Nisha is suffering from the problem of skin eczema. To pass time is another problem for her. Meantime, Raju marries with Pooja, who neither tries to adjust with her mother-in-law Sona nor with Nisha.

Loneliness compels Nisha to feel that she would go mad sitting inside the house. She wants to work in shop like her brothers. She requests her father Yeshpal, “If only you could take with you, Papaji”, she pleaded in a rush, “I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do,” (p. 268). This reveals her inner quest for independent existence. It also seeks equality of sex, that is Nisha and her brothers belong to different genders. She denies the patriarchal system in a very cool, calm and composed manner, with a same and serene approach.

As Nisha belongs to trader’s family, Yeshpal, her father allows her to join a play way school, instead of going to shop and attend the customers. Pooja conceives after seven months of marriage and delivers a baby girls. There starts a growing power struggle between Pooja and Nisha. Pooja does not allow her to touch her baby due to dark brown patches of eczema on her skin. Meantime she gets an idea to start business of solwar suits. She demands a year from her father to prove her ability with this innovative idea. She pleads: “Give me a chance to show you what I can do”, (p. 287). In Nisha’s life, “A journey of business woman begins from this point”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 82).

Here, as a new woman she appears to be self-assured and confident. She dares to pronounce her volition and conviction. Yeshapl manages to arrange a place for work and twenty-five thousand rupees to start her business on condition of return. He trusts her without making difference between his son and daughter. Both are treated equally. This lays an emphasis on equality portrayal of Nisha. Nisha arranges tailor masterji Mohseen Khan and assigns important issues with Rupa Masi. As her father giving
moral support to Nisha, “Suggests a good name for her shop “Nisha’s Creations” (p. 82).

As a responsible working businesswoman, she pays her attention at the quality of dress, which paves way for the latter advancement of settlement in the Ready Made Cloth Market. As Nisha strives hard, “her flourishing business gives her economic independence”, (Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writings, p. 132). Within a year she repays half of the twenty-five thousand loan. Pooja also offers her help. Being a business woman, Nisha tackles every problem on her own. For instance, “Mummy, what have you done?” wailed Nisha, “Even if he (Mohseen Khan) sleeps he never cuts less than five suits a day. I promised Gyan’s twenty by day after, if he doesn’t come, my reputation will be spoilt. Do you know how competitive the market is?” (Home, p. 294). This proves Nisha to be dashing and darer in decision making and self-assured. Though, she takes help of Pooja and mother in-charge, she doesn’t allow them to interfere in her decision. Meanwhile the marriage will go on her birthday; the family pundit predict that she will make good marriage soon.

At last, Nisha is shown a picture of a widower in his early thirties, the similar mangli named Arvind, who wants to meet her. “Why does he want to see me?” persisted Nisha, “I don’t want to see him. You have chosen it is enough”, (p. 298). The situation in Home reminds one of an identical treatment meted out to ‘Ammu’ the female protagonist, in Arundati Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997), who also falls in deep love with Velutha, a low-caste, Parvana boy. Ammu, “a divorcee with two children” belongs to upper caste, and her fierce love-making to Velutha is not acceptable to her parental family. The ‘Love Laws’ enacted by a tyrannical society that “lay down who should be loved, and how much”, (The God of Small Things, p. 259) prove fatal for the two truly loving souls.

But one thing is certain in Nisha’s life; she does no matter who she marries. She is going to come in her ‘Creation’ every single day. She has something in her mind to say to the groom. She says her mother, “If I am going to marry him I should be able to say what I like”, (Home, p. 300). This shows that she no more wants to be a mere sexual object. She reveals her freedom in the meeting with Arvind.
“I work”, she offered.
“Tent know”, (Arvind)
“I would like to continue”
“How long have you been doing this business?”
“Two years”
“Two years”, more pause, more thought,
“You must have worked very hard”

“Yes”, she said, “It is called Nisha’s Creations”. “Lots of women are doing ready made. I see small boutiques operating from houses all over Daryaganj”. “I cannot give it up”, she confined (p. 303). Nisha does not want to trap her entire life into home. So she abides condition to her groom that she should have freedom to run her business even after their marriage. As a business woman, Nisha works spontaneously for last two years. It brings to her sense of achievement in life helping her to create her own identity, her own voice; and her own place in the society and in home.

This success leads her to get marry and fulfill her quest for home that may be parental or of one’s own, the key factor of the novel. The importance of Nisha’s marriage lies in the fulfillment of the family of Arvind, who is marrying for the second time after an accidental death of his first wife. They get registered marriage and Nisha gets entrapped into the in escapable cage of ‘Home’. Nisha also gets entrapped into her own home and cares for mother-in-law. When Nisha thinks about her business, “she hands over the charge of her establishment to Pooja, who is tactful in handling customers and very sociable”, (Ashok Kumar, p. 44).

Nisha delivers twins after months of her marriage. Now in the midst of her family in her own home, she, while playing the roles of daughter-in-law, wife and mother, is very happy and satisfied. To sum up, it would be proper to say that Nisha as an individual could create separate room for herself in home and society. She, as an education and spirited new woman, could refuse to be treated as an object instead tried to establish her own identity.

It is necessary to note that she belongs to middle class family in metropolis, who is born and brought up in India, where social and cultural scenario is different than
that of western countries. Her quest for self identity, struggle for economic independent existence, and her equality with men depend upon Indian social ethos. In *Emergence of New Woman in Novels of Manju Kapur*, Laxmi Sharma is apt to say:

“The emergence of new omen in the realm of social, economic, cultural and racial aspects will also be probed..... The concept of new women in Indian society varies from the one in the west........” (*Literary India* – 2009).

It seems that Manju Kapur wants to have complete liberation to new woman in socio-cultural India. As she, herself studied in Halifax for few years in the early 1970s, presents portrayal of new woman and honours Indian tradition very well. She maintains the character of Nisha, to create awareness of women’ liberation and equality along with men, not fully bloomed but at least upto mark.

Though Kapur has portrayed the character of Nisha as an educated, confident, self-assured, bold and independent spirited new woman, Kapur, paying honour to Indian tradition, like Ezekiel, believes ‘Home is where one has to gather grace’.

According to all three novels, one can say how the female protagonist raise their voice of protest against their families are the rejection of an arranged marriage, the incomprehensible ambition to study and the unfortunate display of an independent will.