Chapter – 7

Conclusion
Manju Kapur’s fictions make her stand firm and strong in the literary artists in India. Her novels come with varied features and aspects which make Manju Kapur a versatile writer. The background of her novels presents Indian people, Indian society, Indian family life and Indian psyche. The chief focus, of course, is life of Indian woman suffering marginal status due to oppression of conventional Indian society. Kapur’s protagonists come out as modern women who dare to challenge the set norms by treading upon independent path of life. They defy the conventional norms designed for women and appear as new women who do not submit themselves to the servitude of society. The modern woman in Manju Kapur’s fictions like Virmati in Difficult Daughters, Astha and Pipeelika in A Married woman, Nisha in Home Nina in The Immigrant, Shagun and Ishita in Custody stand confident in creating their own life through their efforts but in this process of defying the customs, all of them have to pass through sufferings and mental agony. Kapur presents new women rejecting age-old traditions but she ends up almost all her novels without reaching to any concrete conclusion.

Virmati in Difficult Daughters justify the title of the novel because she turns out as a difficult daughter opposing conventions. She appears as a bold and daring woman who walks on the difficult path of chasing independence. In the novel Manju Kapur presents the love story of a beautiful and bold young woman. She engages in pre-marital physical relations with her lover and wants to live an autonomous life as a modern woman but in her endeavor of being free and independent she is defeated by her own family relatives. Her own mother fails to understand Virmati’s emotions. Her lover cheats and indirectly harasses her by avoiding marriage for more than five years. Actually, it is Harish who is behind Virmati’s agony and suffering. Had he shown respect and daring in his relation towards Virmati, her anguish and frustration could be lessened. It is Harish who uses Virmati and keeps sexual relations with her even
after being married to another woman and finally marries her secretly without giving her all rights of a wife.

Gender discrimination, victimization of a woman because of being a woman, increase of a woman’s suffering because of a woman are the highlighting features of Kapur’s novels. Observing Virmati’s life, one can easily assert that it is Kasturi, her mother herself, who comes out as a source of suffering for her. Her foolishness to map the needs of her young daughter, her adherence to pretence, social reputation and her narrow-mindedness become the prime reasons of Virmati’s sufferings in life.

It is quite natural that a daughter always finds solace with her mother because along with being her creator, a mother also belongs to same gander who can better feel the aspirations and pain of a daughter. But in Kasturi’s case she is engulfed with a layer of conventionality and so an orthodox mother disowns Virmati for marrying Harish. This can be observed unfortunate for women that not only men dominate and suppress them but in a society like Indian, even women many times behave as their enemies. It is evident as the worst aspect of woman’s life that the same gender turns out as a major hindrance in her advancements.

*Difficult Daughters* emerges as saga of partition and struggle for independence. A woman’s struggle for freedom is symbolized with a country’s struggle for the same and Kapur remarkably succeeds here in presenting the fragmentation and isolation as the direct results for independence struggle. The novel rightly presents the patriarchy and conventionality as the major hindrance against women empowerment and harmony in man-woman relationship. Education can play an important role in this situation and it not only decreases the bad effects of traditionality but it injects the scientific way of thinking and a mature understanding.

The title to the novel present sarcastic implications because the daughters are never difficult for parents. They stand for genuine and long-lasting love for parents. It is seen that a daughter takes much more care of parents without selfish motives whereas a son’s concern diverts towards his wife and children after the marriage. This natural phenomena is common in society and is also evident in Kapur’s novel *Home* where Sona’s only son Raju suddenly gets changed in attitude and behavior towards Nisha and his mother after his marriage with Pooja. Any decrease or
alternation in a daughter’s love is not seen even after marriage. On the other hand a son’s affection often changes towards his parents at the later stage in life. So daughters are adorable creations of God and hence they can never be difficult but here the title of the novel has a significant indication. The conventions are taken so strongly and rigidly by the protagonist’s parents that Virmati’s any move for independence categorize her as a ‘difficult daughter’.

To expose the conflict between autonomy and social traditions, Kapur beautifully names the fiction as Difficult Daughters. Along with presenting Virmati as a difficult daughter, the novelist also brings forth a difficult mother, Kasturi who appears as a stern follower of family traditions and turns out as a difficult mother for Virmati. Studying Virmati’s case from individual and social perspective, she is not at fault at all as her assertion is only for her claim and ownership of her life. From the human perspective too Virmati is right in her pursuit of independent life because the creator has equally imbibed the abilities to live one’s own life in the world without making any discrimination between male and female. It is Kasturi who is responsible for Virmati’s condition. Had she satisfied her daughter’s common need for affection and love, she would have never been so defiant against the family.

The novel is a beautiful account of mother- daughter relationship. The fiction stands as an excellent example for those mothers who, being too much traditional many times, become blind to the aspirations of their young daughters. The novel extraordinarily presents the issue of woman’s independence in a world wherein they are believed and treated submissive and obedient to males of the family. Virmati, as a modern and new woman, defies this system as she asserts her right over her life. In this manner she comes out as a woman of new generation who has freed herself from all limitations and truly becomes independent and equal. Strength of her character lies in her decisiveness and being bold when she says to Harish to be honest wither in their relation. She frequently questions Harish why they do not get married. She blames Harish to prolong the situation. She further says that she can bear anything except his cowardice and negligence.

The second novel A married Woman comes before the readers as a story of a married woman’s predicament. The opening lines of the novel represent women’s condition in the male- dominated society. The girls in India are brought up over-
protective and they learn the lessons of womanhood early in life. Astha who marries Hemant, selected by her parents, does not find contentment in marital life. The domesticity and homely confinement compels her find meaning and identity in life. Like other conventional women, she no more believes a woman’s life meaningful through being a housewife only.

Asthा emerges as a modern woman who explores her talent in painting and teaching. She becomes a self-reliant woman by being a teacher and she also participates in social activities by becoming an active member of Sampradayakta Mukti Munch. Inside and outside involvement of the protagonist makes her stand firm as a well educated and intellectual citizen of country. Thus, Kapur’s protagonist in this novel is not a woman submissive to age-old traditions and customs, but a woman of new age with modern and advanced approach towards life.

This can be claimed as the distinctive feature of Kapur’s fictions that in her novels a reader always finds a new avatar of woman. The conflict between the rigid norms and aspiration for freedom becomes clearly evident in her protagonists’ lives. Struggle between the domestic duties and searching for one’s own identity is witnessed in Astha’s life. She cleverly balances her homely roles of being a mother, wife, daughter-in-law and the ambitions to fulfill her dreams of being a teacher, a social activist and a painter. But it must be noted that out of all her duties, she never abandons her strong attachment with the home. Feeling isolated and aloof, she engages in intimate contacts with Pīpeelika but when she feels that Pīpeelika is only utilizing her to fulfill her lust, she break off her intimacy and realizes her proper place and relations. The words that she uses during the conversation with Hemant is very significant. When Astha and Hemant are on USA tour, Hemant asks her what does she want that he does not give her. Astha’s reply in three simple words summarize her predicament and expectations from her husband and in-laws. Her answer is, “Interest. Togetherness. Respect.” (A Married Woman 275)

Asthा’s short and crisp response lights up a married woman’s need after marriage. Generally, it is seen that in the married life women are treated as sex objects and gradually they are trapped in homely duties and consequently never get an opportunity to act, and live independently. The men get involved in business or professional development and the women often find themselves neglected and
confined at home. The monotony of routine life and husband’s negligence become the prime reasons behind her deviation from the set path. Her advancement in forbidden lesbian relation has its root in unhappy married life. Astha is in search of a companion who can understand her, love her, and spend time with her instead of only desiring her body. Thus, *A Married woman* highlights a genuine account of a woman’s life and appealing universally it stands relevant to all those woman who are treated marginally in the society.

Through reading of Kapur’s novels, one comes across certain similarities in almost all her novels. These similarities can be termed as prevalent themes of her novels. The first common aspect that is evident in Manju Kapur’s novels is their dealing with women’s lives. Detail account of feminine gender is clearly present in all the novels that become the major characteristic feature of her novels. Being a woman and born and brought up in Indian society, Manju Kapur provides an authentic account of woman’s condition and predicament in male-dominated Indian society. It is Virmati around whose life the *Difficult Daughters* revolves around. The major focus is given to her life, her aspirations, the circumstance wherein she is brought up and her fight for freedom from conventional bondage.

Her second novel *A Married Woman* too is an account of a married woman’s life who challenges the women’s confinement in the domestic life and emerges as a conscious and an intelligent woman well aware about her rights. *Home* again is a story of Nisha and the incidents that one comes across in the novel relate to a family of Banwari Lal. The focus of the novelist lies here on the lives of women like Sona Rupa, Sushila, Nisha and Sunita. *The Immigrant* narrates the story of Nina. The fiction describes her journey from being a spinster to a dissatisfied married woman. The novel is a detailed account of Nina and Anand’s incompatible married life in multi-cultural Canada.

The fifth novel *Custody* is too a vivid narration of women’s lives. The women’s lives that are narrated are the stories of Shagun and Ishita. The conflicts and marital issues that are raised in their lives are accounted with considerable depth.

Thus, the major theme that appears in Kapur’s novels is her depiction of Indian women’s lives in Indian orthodox social set-up.
The second important feature of Kapur’s novels is her protagonists’ struggle against conventional set standards for woman. Through this struggle the reader witnesses the emergence of new woman in Kapur’s novels. In each and every novel of Manju Kapur, one comes to know about a rebellious woman who comes out of domestic trap and attempts to live independently. These women struggle hard against traditionally set pattern and carve their destiny. Virmati struggles against traditionally arranged marriage, and gets the status of a second wife of a married man. For this she endures the boycott from both the families.

Struggle against conventions appear as a struggle for individual freedom and ownership of one’s life. The first generation woman in Kapur’s novels like Kasturi in Difficult Daughters, Sita and Astha’s mother-in-law in A Married Woman, Sona in Home, Nina’s mother in The Immigrant and Shagun’s mother-in-law in Custody, get absorbed in the accepted conventional roles of women. But the second and third generation women in Kapur’s novels find themselves in new India where they witness a liberal approach towards women who get educated, do job and engage themselves in different activities. So the protagonists in Kapur’s novels are new women with an independent approach towards life. Since they exhibit a demand for individual freedom as men have, a clash arises between these women and their family members who insist on following the conventional roles set for them.

In Difficult Daughters Virmati rejects the traditional marriage with a boy who is selected by her family which consequently results in separation from family and not being adopted as Harish’s legitimate wife brings disaster in her life. Independent approach of living and rejection of conventional confinement at home is apparent in Astha’s life in A Married Woman. Instead of being trapped in domesticity, she comes out and becomes self-reliant by becoming a teacher, a painter and a social activist. But her over burden and engagement in multiple activities only result in headaches and stress.

One issue that comes to the reader’s notice needs to be mentioned at this juncture. In their struggle for identify and proving their potential, Kapur’s protagonists witness themselves alone. The family members and in-laws never stand by them in their pursuit of significance in life. The pathos is evident in Kapur’s novels in the protagonists’ lives because if they accept the confinement at home and engage
themselves only in domestic roles, they are supported but when they make an effort to reject the tradition and begin to live independently, they face opposition and threat. Nisha is locked up in home as she decides a love marriage with a lower caste man. Nina in *The Immigrant* is pressurized for an arranged marriage by her mother. Before marriage she used to live a happy and independent life working as a lecturer in Miranda House, Delhi. But after marriage gradually her life worsens as she encounters a situation of being a childless woman. Anand’s pre-mature ejaculation proves a hindrance that deprives Nina from being a mother. This sexual deformity becomes the chief reason for creation of marital rift between the couple which ultimately leads to infidelity in married life. Both of them find solace outside and engage in extra-marital affair. Thus, compulsion for arranged marriage, on the contrary, degrade Nina’s entire life and what she gets is only anguish and incompatibility of marriage.

Indian society is fundamentally a conservative type. Standards and set norms for men and women are different and partial. The freedom and flexibility is found much more for men whereas women are always believed to be submissive and obedient to men. Their lives are meant meaningful through marriage and family only. Under the patriarchal influence the women are believed ideal care takers of family and home. Arranged marriage is depicted as a compulsion for the protagonists and any deviation from it only brings sorrow and separation from family. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati is strongly compelled to marry the samaj boy selected by parents. But her love for Harish makes her reject the arranged marriage and resultantly she alone bears the consequences. Astha in *A Married Woman* willingly accepts the groom selected by the parents. She also has affairs initially but they do not last long.

Asth'a doesn’t find herself completely contented due to Hemant’s negligence towards her and lack of understanding. In *Home* enforcement for traditional marriage comes before the reader when Nisha is compelled to marry within their caste. Love marriage of Nisha and Suresh is strongly opposed by the Banwari Lal family and she is locked up in house to get her married to a man of their caste. Here one more factor that effects the traditional marriage in India is highlighted in the novel. Nisha, being a mangli girl, needs a mangli boy. Banwari Lals give more consideration to matching of horoscope before marriage. Rigidity of conventional approach is exposed by the
novelist through Banwari Lal family members as then seem more worried about Nisha as being a mangli.

Compulsion for marriage is also evident in The Immigrant where it occurs in the protagonist’s life. In the opening of the novel, Nina is described as a spinster who has reached the age of thirty. Nina doesn’t like the arranged marriage but as she already crossed thirty, she accepts the proposal that comes and marries Anand. But her marital life gradually turns disastrous after the initial happiness when she finds about the sexual abnormality of her husband. Thus, through an enforced marriage her life gets even worse. The pre-married life of Nina is narrated happier than the post married life.

Another characteristic feature that is observed in Kapur’s novels is strain in mother-daughter relationship. The women characters who appear as mothers in these fictions are the first generation women who are accustomed with the accepted roles of women in families. The daughters are depicted as second generation women who rebel against the traditions. Thus, the conflict occurs between mother and daughter in almost all the novels of Manju Kapur. This conflict surfaces in Difficult Daughters. Virmati is decisive not to waste her life for family’s reputation and social status. As an average individual she claims her right over her life. It is her love relation with Harish and her failure of being loved in family that makes her a rebel against the decided marriage with the canal engineer. Kasturi, being a typical conventional mother, treats Virmati harshly for her decision. The strain between mother and daughter is that much intensified that she completely boycotts her own daughter after her marriage with the married professor.

The dispute and mismatch in opinions between Astha and Sita is clearly seen in A Married Woman. In her initial love affairs, it is Sita who plays a significant role in Astha’s break-up with Bunty. Later on when Sita sells the house and gives money to son-in-law instead of her daughter, again the conflict appears between them. Sita teaches her a lesson of adaptability and acceptance in marriage but Astha instead of remaining a housewife only, brings forth her creativity and takes part in social activities in spite of her mother-in-law’s opposition. For social activities, she also invites dispute with her mother-in-law. She goes to attend the EktaYatra and spends fifteen days in spite of disapproval of all her family members. Summarizing “Quest
Manju Kapur’s Astha is on a never ending quest for equality and this could be felt in this quest the author’s own demand for a niche for women. Astha could be found struggling against odds and in certain instances not only a male dominated society but also against women, who have for centuries placed decision making powers in the hands of men, who are considered by them as head of the family, who must be consulted for everything. When Astha’s mother decides to leave, sells off her plot and gives the balance to Hemant to manage or invest wherever it suits him best, Astha is shattered and her statement testifies it when she says, “Really Ma, don’t you think women can be responsible for their own investments? (MW 97). She takes up teaching but not without protest from her husband. It was just because of her quest for an identity for herself. But her husband thinks of it as petty as he is a believer of the old ways and is the firm believer of that men work out of the home, women within. Men carry forward the family line, women enable their mission. (n.p.)

Analyzing the issue of woman’s identity, Nagpal further elaborates the discussion and focuses on Astha’s predicament as a conventionally married woman. She adds:

She enjoys the pleasures of material prosperity – good house, bank balance, occasional trips abroad but experiences a void in spite of it all. She reprimands herself at times for being unreasonable but nevertheless is dissatisfied with this hollowness and this is the irony of Manju Kapoor’s women. There comes a transitional phase in their life and they tend to become different from a traditional woman and want to break out into new paths. However, the change is more of theoretical in nature. When it comes to reality, they lack courage and resume to patriarchal hegemony. What happens to Astha is the most representative of the destiny of the Indian woman; even the educated lot. Herein the author succeeds in raising a question by becoming a representative of her clan: Even in this age of liberty and emancipation
of women, why is it that women are cordoned off within the four walls of their homes and wonder why have they been denied the right to choose their own destinies? But she also reminds us that this quest of identity is relentless, ceaseless and never ending. (n.p.)

In *Home* this characteristic feature appears through the character of Sona and Nisha. Sona, the typical conventional daughter-in-law of Banwari Lal family, appears rigid when the matter of her daughter’s marriage is to be decided. Nisha loves Suresh and wants to marry him but her mother opposes the marriage strictly and locks her up in the family. Later on when she caresses Pooja’s newly born son, she is stopped doing that due to the possible infection to the child. Even at this time Sona does not support her daughter for her moral right over the newly born nephew. Due to this incident, she gets much disturbed and gets frustrated.

The strain in mother-daughter relationship comes to surface when Nina does not show much interest in arranged marriage. Nina’s mother, Mrs. Batra, attempts hard to convince her for a conventional marriage and it is Anand’s NRI status and profession of a dentist in well developed Canada that attracts Mrs. Batra and she convinces Nina for the arranged marriage. It is her mother’s selection of her groom that turns the biggest cause for suffering in her life later on. It is Anand’s physical deformity which becomes the major reason for the incompatibility of Nina and Anand’s marriage. It is this sexual abnormality which deprives Nina from being a mother because due to Anand’s physical problem the couple doesn’t get successful sexual intercourse which not only leaves Nina a childless married woman but also deprives her of sexual satisfaction. Nina cannot endure the pain of being a childless woman and that proves her biggest suffering in married life.

Thus, enforcement for traditional marriage appears as a characteristic feature in Kapur’s novels. The conventional mothers of Manju Kapur’s novels believe their moral and parental responsibility to select well settled grooms for their daughters. But their proposals and plans only make their daughters’ lives painful and troublesome. Kasturi’s headstrong attitude to marry Virmati to Inderjit becomes the major reason of the protagonist’s revolt in the fiction. Astha’s mother Sita always behaves conventionally and takes the side of her in-laws. She only prescribes acceptance, adjustment and adaptability for a happy married life. It must be noted here that Sita
advises her daughter but doesn’t say a single word to her son-in-law. Sita’s character reflects the typical Indian mentality that adjustment and acceptance is expected from women only, as if men are completely free and can do anything they like and behave accordingly. Her letters to Astha and her preaching indirectly suggest that it is a woman who has to adjust and accept the conditions in in-law’s house.

In *Home* it is Sona who teaches Nisha the rules and regulations for a married woman. She makes Nisha keep a fast and attend the rituals of Vat Savitri Vrat. She rejects Nisha’s demand of love marriage with Suresh and finally makes her marry to Arvind, a mangli man, who marries Nisha only because he wants someone to take care of his house and his old mother. Thus, here again a mother’s selection for her daughter turns out only a mismatch in form of Nisha and Arvind’s marriage. Thus, it can be said that conventional mothers in Kapur’s fictions only and only bring about the sorrow and sufferings in their daughter’s lives. Their conventional approach towards their daughters completely fails to meet the demands of their daughters of leading a free and autonomous life.

Another major aspect which is witnessed in Manju Kapur’s fictions is protagonists’ treading on forbidden paths. In conservative Indian society standard and norms for women’s lives are set in advance. But the novelist cleverly presents her protagonists as new women who do not sacrifice their lives for the sake of social conventions. Kapur’s women characters do not hesitate to lead an autonomous life. The protagonists in her novels openly follow their own decisions and live life on their own terms. They do not abide themselves by the sexual limitations which the conventional women never dare to cross.

Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* falls in love with professor Harish and unhesitatingly engages in pre-marital physical relation with him. This kind of love affair is not accepted in society but Virmati never seems worried about society’s or her family’s reactions. Actually, it is love that makes her cross all the set limits and consequently only brings disaster and isolation in her life. Love marriage to a married man is not approved in the society and only brings bitter consequences but still Virmati dares enough to be brave and does every attempt to make her love marriage a successful one. It becomes partially successful as Harish marries her, but because he
legally does not accept her and doesn’t divorce Ganga. Virmati’s gain only remains partial.

In her second novel *A Married Woman* Manju Kapur comes before the readers with a modern issue of women’s life. The protagonist, Astha, and another major woman character in the fiction, Pipeelika, involve in lesbian relation. The physical relations between women can never he thought in a conservative society like Indian. Sexual norms and standards are strictly followed and its practice is strongly expected in society and in case of women it becomes much more significant. Pipeelika instigates Astha for lesbian relation. It is Astha’s marital void and isolation which is taken a complete advantage of by lesbian Pipeelika. Astha’s sexual engagement with Pipeelika serves as an alarming signal for all married men who allow, voluntarily or involuntarily, to arise distance in their married life. Actually, it is Hemant who is responsible behind Astha’s lesbian proximity because he gets so much involved in material gain that her forgets his wife is in need of love, concern and company. Thus, the distance that is created between Astha and Hemant is due to lack of understanding between each other. It is Astha’s need of love, need to spend time with Hemant and showing and sharing interest and concern for each other which sounds critical in her life. Unfortunately, there elements are missing in their married life and consequently Pipeelika better utilizes Astha’s condition and drags her in sexual relation.

Nisha in *Home* is portrayed as a modern new woman who too follows the forbidden path. She engages in love with Suresh and both of them advance in physical relation but it must be noted here that Nisha is comparatively more conventional than Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*. Nisha keeps a limit to their physical advances prior to marriage whereas Virmati is more passionate and bold who doesn’t follow any restriction and engages in a complete physical relation with her lover, the Professor. She even gets pregnant and gets abortion prior to her marriage with Harish. This is something quite daring and unacceptable in a conservative society and family wherein she lives. Nisha is also ready for elopement with Suresh but Suresh proves out coward and unprepared to lead a life against family and society. Undoubtedly, Nisha does not cross the boundary in her relation with Suresh, but she wonders with him freely in the city and goes to watch movies and morning shows with him and in the darkness of the theatre, they do make physical advancements.
Thus, Kapur’s heroine in *Home* travels to the forbidden way and comes out as a modern woman having a free and autonomous ideology.

Rejection of the limits and coming out of conventions is also outlined in *The Immigrant*. Nina, the protagonist here suffers the sexual abnormality of Anand. Due to the physical problem of Anand, the couple doesn’t succeed in sexual relation which resultantly doesn’t make Astha conceive a child. It can be said that possessing a desire to be a mother is a natural genetic instinct in a woman. Her condition worsen because Anand, even though he knows his physical dysfunction, doesn’t ever disclose it with Nina. Anand’s sexual dysfunction and the marital rift that arises between them leaves Astha feeling of being cheated. She gets frustrated because the happiness that she had sought through a marriage with a well-to-do dentist in Canada, doesn’t transform in reality and her dream of a happy and peaceful married life in an unknown country gets shattered completely. Nina comes across Anand’s sexual relation with other woman. When she returns from India she notices a grey colour hair of a white woman lying on her bedroom. She quickly gets the idea of Anand’s sexual attachment with a white woman. The increased incompatibility of her marriage brings. Nina closer to Anton, a white man, in the library school where she starts working.

Alienated and dissatisfied of sexual pleasure due to her husband’s premature ejaculation, Nina gets involved in physical relation with Anton who finds her attractive, pretty and intelligent. Thus, the circumstance leads her to have the extra-marital affair and for which she does not feel guilty because her husband gives her enough evidence of marital infidelity and the environment wherein she lives in Canada provides her a feel of equality of men and women and independence of both the genders. The western free culture of Canada inspires Nina to claim her rights of her life and the impartiality towards gender difference makes Nina realize that she is an independent woman of an independent nation and has all rights to fulfill her desires. Thus, Nina travels to the restricted aspect of a married woman’s life but the chief cause behind her extra-marital affair with Anton is the incompatibility of her marriage.

The protagonists in *Custody* Shagun and Ishita are two different women characters signifying different values and perspectives of woman’s life Shagun is
depicted as a modern new woman who is very beautiful and engages in extra-marital affair with Ashok, her husband’s boss. She is portrayed as a non submissive and a woman possessing a modern temperament and attitude. She gets easily attracted towards Ashok who is rich and pays attention towards her and shows interest for her. On the other hand, Shagun’s husband Raman can’t spend more time with Shagun as he remains more busy in business. The lack of togetherness and understanding of each other’s need and condition create the marital rift between Raman and Shagun and consequently it leads Shagun to extra-marital physical relationship with Ashok. Thus, Kapur’s protagonist here again comes out as a modern woman who is unwilling to compromise with her desires and dreams for the sake of a conventionally arranged marriage.

Thus, in all the novels we come to know about the modern women who have learnt a new perspective of living their lives. They come out as equal human beings and seem in no way inferior to men. The gender difference and conventional oppression is thrown away by these modern new women. All most all the issues of women’s lives get highlighted in Kapur’s novels, love relation of young Virmati is depicted in *Difficult Daughters* and along with the bitter consequence of pursuing love marriage is also exposed cleverly by the novelist. The realistic description of the events and story is the characteristic and distinctive feature in Kapur’s novels which place her among the top literary artists of world. In *A Married Woman* it is a married woman’s isolation and marital rift which is presented effectively. Women’s involvement outside the domestic duties and successful presentation in art and social activities is shown effectively by Manju Kapur. Astha develops as a painter and an active social worker during the course of the novel. She becomes self reliant by being a teacher that shows the freedom and independence of the second gender: woman.

The other major controversial issue which is presented by the novelist is sexual relations between women. Manju Kapur honestly depicts the unaccepted and formidable lesbian relation. Actually, the reader witness Manju Kapur’s authentic attempt to present the causes of a married woman’s deviation towards lesbian relationship. The negligence of her husband and craving for a companion, who can understand her and love her, make Astha involve in forbidden relation from which later on she intentionally draws distance and eventually cease it. It is the married
woman’s agony which is effectively depicted in the novel wherein Astha feels herself trapped in the domesticity only.

In *Home* several issues of women’s lives are narrated. It is the molestation which young Nisha faces at the early age. Her love affair with Suresh is narrated by the novelist and consequent confinement in the house is given as a punishment for going against the family and rejecting the conventions. Woman’s position in a traditional Indian family is also presented by the novelist. A young unmarried woman, when she crosses the marriageable age, is treated as a burden in her own family. In *Home* Nisha’s siblings get married but she does not get a proper match for a long time. She crosses the age of thirty and gradually she feels herself as a guest in her own house. Her own sister-in-law Pooja behaves adversely towards Nisha and she does not allow her even to touch her newly born baby. Due to Nisha’s skin decease Pooja is afraid of possible infection to the baby. In her own house this insulting behavior of her sister-in-law disturbs Nisha intensely. Her mother also doesn’t support and stand by her consoling for her problems.

Thus, woman’s individual identity is not accepted in Indian society. Her existence is always evaluated in context to her relations and connections with her husband and in-laws. The distinctive feature that gets exposed in all the fictions of Kapur is her marginal status. Kapur’s protagonists come out as revolting and attempt hard to set out their own identity as any other individual but in this process of developing their own self and image as an independent person they endure lots of hardships but eventually they emerge as bold and brave modern new women, never worrying about the reactions of family and society. And that is why Kapur’s women appear as rebels and revolutionaries and set out new benchmark in the advancement of women in terms of their personal and psychological development.

The other major issue that is highlighted in Manju Kapur’s novels, is marital rift between her protagonists and their husbands. This marital disturbance occurs because the males expect the conventional attitude and behavior whereas the protagonists in the fictions are no more conventional. They exhibit the approach of equality and freedom. The counterparts of the female protagonists suffer from the notion of male supremacy and that is because the reader comes across the marital void between the couples. Undoubtedly, the reasons of their incompatibility are different in
each fiction, but the major cause behind the clash between them remains the same and that is conventionality versus modernity. It is Harish’s continued relationship with Ganga and delay in their marriage which causes distance between them. In *A Married Woman* it is absence of togetherness and lack of understanding which create void between Astha and Hemant. It becomes the major cause of Astha’s deviation towards sexual attachment with Pipeelika. In *Home*, it is Arvind’s selfish concern to marry someone who can care his family and his sick mother which finally becomes the root cause of Nisha’s frustration. She willingly diverts her attention from her shop Nisha’s Creation to her domestic duties but in exchange she expects Arvind’s attention, love and interest in her which Arvind fails to comply with.

In *The Immigrant* it is Nina’s deprivation of being a mother due to Anand’s premature ejaculation which plays a major role in creation of a rift in the marital life. Here it is nothingness and void in the protagonist’s life that also increases the distance between the couple. Moreover, Anand himself is seen ashamed of his physical disorder. All these aspects combine to worsen the arranged marriage and provoke the husband and wife both to find and fulfill the physical and mental aspirations with other partners. In *Custody* the marital distance occurs in lives of two couples: Shagun and Raman, Ishita and Suryakant. Shagun is depicted as a modern woman who needs all kinds of luxuries in life and wants a husband who can live for her like a puppet. Raman is an enthusiastic man committed to his business and family. He fails to satisfy Shagun’s physical and mental urges. Consequently, love triangle takes place when Raman’s boss Ashok enters the story. Raman’s over-involvement in business and avoiding time with his wife strengthens the rift between them and finally Shagun’s love relation with Ashok is exposed and the arranged marriage of Raman and Shagun breaks apart. The marital complications like divorce and custody of children are presented effectively by the novelist. Kapur indicates here that the smaller issues between the couple can increase gradually in bigger difficulties and it can lead to separation in family. The separation of mother and father causes drastic impact on mind of innocent children.

Other issues of women’s lives also come to surface during the course of the reading. One of them is woman’s infertility. In *Custody* it is Ishita’s infertility only which happens as a major cause for the failure of her arranged marriage with
Suryakant. To produce a child is believed as if a compulsory duty of a woman’s life. In Ishita’s case, she fails to conceive a baby so she is not at all important for her in-laws. Thus, Kapur sarcastically mentions here that society is that much rigid and orthodox that only a married woman suffers due to genetic problems in her body or her husband’s body. It is Ishita who suffers due to her own infertility and she is divorced by Suryakant only due to this reason. On the other hand, it is Nina in The Immigrant who suffers due to not hers but her husband’s genetic abnormality. Thus, the irony of a woman’s life which is beautifully exposed by the novelist is that in whatsoever case, if there is absence of a child in a couple’s life, only and only woman is bound to suffer. This tragic aspect and unjust conventionality is beautifully narrated by the novelist and that makes the writer worthy of the high rank.

Thus, several complexities of woman’s life that come before the reader in Kapur’s novels are the arranged marriage enforced as a compulsion, its post-married complexities and childbirth as the extreme expectation. Marriage and its complexities due to the conventional approach of society remains as a central theme in Kapur’s fictions. The barrenness is also exemplified through the characters like Sona and Rupa in Home. Both the sisters pass several years after their marriage without children. They can’t conceive for many years and Rupa is narrated childless throughout her life. Sona is occasionally taunted by her mother-in-law for her barrenness and she herself does many prayers to God to bless her with a child.

Kapur’s fictions are pure reflections of authentic accounts of women’s predicament in a male-dominated society wherein only men decide what women should do and should not, how they should act and how they must not. Thus, Kapur succeeds in exposing the double standards of the society which are unjust and partial. As per there standards women are only expected to follow the pre-decided roles for them and any deviation from these roles can only and only bring suffering to women. Through the actions of her protagonists, Kapur presents a clear clash between the age-old traditions and modern women who only assert their full rights over their life.

The protagonists in her novels seem rebellious but in the real sense they are the free individuals of a freed nation. These women characters are the women of new India which is more flexible, reasonable and advanced in terms of approach towards
life. Gender discrimination is seen in the fictions but Kapur’s chief female characters do not get subjugated to the partial and unjust conventions.

But the important fact which is witnessed in her novels is that even though all the major female characters in her novels are rebels against customs and traditions, they never tear themselves apart from their home. Home remains a significant attachment for all the protagonists. They cross the boundaries and live as per their own desires but finally they come back to their home. They always possess a strong feeling to create their individual identity but never want to be separated from their family. Family and its attachment remain as a significant factor in the protagonists’ lives.

Commenting on intellectual experience behind creativity, H. Uma Maheswari beautifully discusses Kapur’s novels. She writes:

Manju Kapur is one of the most appreciated contemporary Indian English woman novelists. She insists that the world she portrays analytically in her novels stems from the intellectual experience of her academic life. Her basic approach is to liberate women from the oppressive measures of patriarchy. The protagonists in her novel therefore, endure physical, emotional and psychological sufferings, but finally are able to attain their long cherished freedom to a great extent. Manju Kapur’s novels enable the readers to get an idea of the feminist struggle against biases. Striking a balance between a natural co-existence on one hand and unfettered freedom and space on the other, her eloquent narration of women’s issues is nevertheless, both Indian and universal. Kapur has chosen a period of political, economic and social changes and so it has become necessary for a woman also to redefine her new role and determine its parameters for her and society.

(267)

The fundamental natural force of life is love which finds its just manifestation in Kapur’s fictions. The chief female characters in her novels pass their lives in pursuit of love and in some cases they succeed partially, like Virmati, and in other cases they fail to achieve it. The other significant and noticeable aspect which comes
to reader’s notice is the protagonists’ need and expectation to be loved by their male counterparts, to spend quality time with them and to get respect and concern from them. As Astha says to Hemant in *A Married Woman*, they do not want to live only as sex objects of their husbands. They demand respect, love and concern. Thus, Kapur’s fictions are clear and valid assertions of the deprived gender who has suffered servitude for thousands of years and now want to liberate themselves from unjust bondage of traditions and customs. In the modern era of science and technology, it may be completely inappropriate if women are kept behind the bars of conventions and customs. To create a healthier society, women have to be liberated and the quality of men and women only can uplift the standard of human life and the better standard of society only can bring better life for the forthcoming generations.

Thus, Kapur’s fictions, stand as role models which advocate women’s rights over their lives. Marriage, as a social institution, is redefined by Manju Kapur. Through exposure of marital rift of arranged marriage, Kapur indirectly points out towards it solution and recovery. Absence of understanding each other and absence of acceptance affect adversely to the marital peace and it should be noted from the fictions that only women show understanding and maturity finally, as Virmati adjusts as a second life in Harish’s house with his first wife, Astha separates from Pipeelika and reunites with Hemant, Nisha leaves her settled business for the sake of her husband and his sick mother, Nina finally returns to her home for a new beginning in Canada and Ishita after getting Roohi’s custody settles down with Raman happily.

Marriage emerges as a focal theme in all her fictions. Through the novels Kapur wonderfully presents the fact before the readers that marriage in itself is a good social institution which is required for the healthy development of the society. But Kapur rejects the rigidity of arranged marriage. The real charm and essence of marital happiness lies in complete understanding between the two partners and having genuine love and concern for each other. It is a direct indication of the novelist that traditions are decided for betterment of people; people, particularly women, should not be trapped by the traditions. Thus, Kapur insists on individuality in human relations and life. She advocates effectively for equal individuality and freedom for men and women. All her novels are echoes and strong assertions of liberation for women; women who have been unjustifiably confined in the limited roles of
domesticity. Woman finds herself being a sandwich between her own inclinations and traditions. In this process of struggle between liberation and convention, Kapur’s fictions redefine the marriage as a social institution.

In an interview with Shah Rukh Khan on TED Talks India, Manju Kapur beautifully explains the need of balance in man-woman relationship in this advanced age. She clarifies:

I write novels, and for this I look at relationships deeply. In life we spend the maximum time with family. And in the same family, girls and boys are brought up differently. Boys are taught they must be responsible for the financial and practical well being of their parents and siblings, find solutions for problems, obviously find a good job. When they get married, it must be to a girl who gels with the family, because she is not only marrying the boy but the entire family. Girls are taught repeatedly to adjust and compromise. They are taught that the needs of others must always be kept before their own. That is why they know how to be sensitive to other's emotions. This ability is not seen in boys because it is hardly touched upon in their upbringing. (n.p.)

Manju Kapur explains how a richer relationship between man and woman is possible and what can be the achievement out of that. With women’s involvement in almost all the sectors, Kapur becomes hopeful of for woman’s recognition I this advanced era. In her interview with TED Talks India she concludes:

Finally, in this male domination, women have a role to play as well. Today, here I am not talking about larger crimes like rapes or acid attacks that we read of in the newspapers every day, I am talking about the little insults and hurts that every woman has to put up with on a daily basis all her life.

Yet today, if we look at it, there is hope for change. In every sector, women are moving ahead rapidly and becoming more independent, and men will have to partner with them because only then
is true love possible. Breaking the old mold, both will progress, have more potential, better personalities. This is new thinking. (n.p.)

Works Cited


