CHAPTER – 3
Relation that has No Name
Feminists have always striven to create new concepts and vocabularies to share and express the experiences of women and to address absence in existing knowledge by highlighting flaws in language, knowledge system and discourse that are constructed by patriarchy. The experiences of woman-woman relationship who do not share a blood bond, although bound by other relationships sharing special bonds, work as a theme for Kapur. To show such kind of bonds she has constructed the aforementioned characters in a positive light that have been missing in the works of male writers. This is due to the Males, as the dominant sex, have only a partial view of the world and yet they are in a position to insist that their views and values are the ‘real’ and only values; and they are in a position to impose their version on other human being who do not share their experience… By this process alternative views and values are suppressed and blocked. Women’s different experience is outlawed, is seen as unintelligible, unreal, unfathomable. (Spender 1-2)

The representation of women faces issues like an absence of experience of women psyche and a limited vocabulary that is constructed to favour, help and maintain patriarchy. Dale Spender, in the context of English language, elucidates this issue:

The language is primarily the product of male efforts and that historically – and currently- men have held greater ‘rights’ to language. That the English language has been literally man made and that it is still primarily under male control… This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility or ‘other’ nature of female,
and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we (they) have inherited. (Spender 12)

Manmade language favours male’s understanding of sexuality and this is imposed on women. Women’s sexuality further divides in relation to race, class, caste, ethnicity and nationality. There is a difference between the Indian and the Western notion on sexuality. In India, women and sexuality are closely related but in the west these are dealt differently. Elizabeth Jackson explains the difference thus:

While recognising sexuality as an important part of the marital relationship, Western feminists have tended to treat it separately because of the ubiquity – and greater social acceptability – of non-marital sexual relationships in the West since the 1960s. Indian feminists, on the whole, have tended to make a stronger link between marriage and sexuality. (Jackson 52)

Women sexuality in male writings is shown in a negative light. The latter uses it as a tool to marginalise women. Patriarchy always suppresses women’s sexuality because they perceive it as a threat to male supremacy. Literature in the hand of men has successfully maintained a constructed notion of sexuality and has been, to certain extent, andocentric and in favour of benevolent sexism which is a personal affirmative notion of protection, ennoblement, and endearment focusing on women. Such hostile sexism obliges to validate women’s subservient position to men. Not only literature but society also has a negative impression on women’s expression of sexuality.

The understanding of sexuality is materialised when understood in relation to widely varying phenomena, from physiological drives to structures of language. The representation and interpretation of sexuality varies as culture varies. Sexuality is a socially and culturally constructed notion. This construction subverts, supresses an
actual self and promotes a constructed one. It gets strength from cultural practices and society. It empowers one group over other.

The acknowledged expression of sexuality in contemporary time is heterosexuality that was reinforced in the Victorian Period which was a result of the Industrial Revolution to supply human labour to industries. Same sex relations were outlawed by the English because it does not favour reproduction. This constructed notion, with the help of legal sanity, overruled the lives of common British subjects in terms of the Victorian morality that was imposed on India in the 19th century.

The relationship between two women is presented in a positive light. This, in the form of an issue, worked as a theme of A Married Woman (2002) through the characters: Astha and Peeplika. Such a relationship faces social discrimination due to the absence of a positive term and gets categorized negatively in assistance with patriarchal language. Kapur, known for raising the issue of ‘Women’, does not mention the term ‘Lesbian' to name the relationship which has a negative connotation in patriarchal discourse that depicts women in a grim light and denies them a right over their sexuality. Patriarchy is always known for controlling women’s sexuality, to maintain and sustain dominance. Patriarchy has always denied to give a positive term to such relationships as identification of any lesbian identity is problematic.

Social construction theory questions the idea of any biological, essential or universal identity as in, for example, ‘the lesbian woman’… Lesbian identities are further problematized socially, by the denial to lesbian woman of an accredited public self, and critically by poststructuralist ideas of fragmented self. (Humm 214)
The theme of women’s sexuality has been evaluated on the basis of psychoanalytical theory to analyze the relation between Astha’s sexuality and its expression. It “describes the relation between female libido, women’s unconscious, and their representation in female discourse. (Humm 114) As feminist criticism and psychoanalysis share some common grounds:

The psychic relation of mothers, fathers and children; the relation between sexuality and its expression; the instability of identity…psychoanalytic critics focus on authors and characters’ motivation and on the hidden areas of the text as well as on the reader's response to surface and subtext…offer a reading of feminine rooted neither entirely in the social construction of femininity nor entirely in biology but in language and subjectivity. (Humm 72)

Sexuality forms one aspect of one’s identity. It does not represent the whole being. The relation between sexuality and its expression is important to explore. The relation changes across cultures. It is difficult to give a universally accepted picture of it. In the West, expression of women’s sexuality is free from marriage. But in India, the expression of sexuality is perceived within marriage whereas outside of marriage it is not socially accepted. Jyoti Puri explains it in the context of narratives:

[M]iddle-class women’s narratives on sexuality within marriage do not support either the picture or the notions of absorbing pollution, simply being sexually available to their husbands, or describing sex primarily as an avenue to motherhood. Rather, in their narratives on sexuality and marriage, these women draw on prescriptive notions of the centrality of sex within marriage in ways that are likely to heighten women’s anxieties as well as their expectations. If marriage is where women are
able to be sexual persons, then it is probable that sexuality would be seen as a central aspect of the marital relationship. (Puri 116)

The institution of marriage propelled the expression of sexuality in a particular way i.e. heterosexuality. To understand Astha’s character, the journey of her sexual identity, from hetero to homo and again returning to hetero, can be done, if explored through her motivations, desires, language and subjectivity. Astha’s subjectivity will relay the relation between her sexuality and its expression.

Women’s identity has no acknowledgement further. Self-destruction and self-restraint have been a part of women's ordinary lifestyle for a long time. With the development of society the changes are discernable. At present, one can see women achieving important positions in the outer world. All over the world writings have recorded that change in woman's stature.

In the novel A Married Woman Kapur is concerned with Indian woman who endeavours to explore her true sexuality and space in life and society. She is concentrated, for the most part, on the woman and her desires, cravings, activities and responses. It is a search of a woman’s sexuality and its expression.

In Indian society middle-class parents have constantly been worrying about the eventual fate of their girl’s education and marriage. Indeed, even after marriage, a few issues like endowment, joint family framework and her education in the in-law's family and so forth are parts of the basic issues for them to tackle with. As a conventional Indian woman Astha Vadera has experienced significant changes, in spite of the fact that any desire for sexual liberty ends up plainly into an organized relationship i.e. marriage. Yet, at the same time, the woman needs to work for her freedom without leaving herself to the decision of others. Sexual orientation and equality remain a myth.
Kapur has encrypted the text on the characters who reveal the hidden agenda of the writer as she has taken her writing as a protest against the emerging issues in socio-political environment of the country from the point of view of a woman by providing prominent space to women in literary texts. The very first paragraph of the novel comments on social practices and shows, realistically, the customary stereotype of parents who demonstrate an age-old practice of getting their daughter married. That is a destiny of Indian girls.

She was her parent’s only child. Her education, her character, her marriage, these were their burdens. She was their future, their hope, and though she didn’t want them to guard their precious treasure so carefully, they did, oh they did. (Kapur 1)

The difference between parenting and planning is evidentially expressed by Gigy J. Alex. The upbringing of Astha and how she was moulded in her life, to fit into the society, happens with almost every woman of India. It qualifies them as good daughters, wives and mothers. Astha was nurtured with the sense of fear of becoming a woman and any blunder could side-line her from being a good woman. Having inculcated the sense of being isolated exposed and insecure, she engrossed all the teachings of her family and society.

Asthा accepts heterosexual relationship as she has been moulded for it since her birth. This is shown as she falls in love with a boy. She is an emotional girl who has lost herself in the dreams of a boy.

Day and night the thought of him kept her inside churning; she was unable to eat, sleep, or study. Away from him, her eyes felt dry and empty. Her ears only registered the sound of his voice. Her mind refused to take seriously anything that was not his face, his body, his feet, his
hands, his clothes. She found temporary relief in sketching him, sketches that were invariably too bad to be mulled over. (Kapur8-9)

Abandoning everyone, she develops a physical relationship with him. The intimacy and passion between Astha and Rohan is elaborated by the writer as she forwards another clue about Astha’s character who has no problem in expression of heterosexuality. These instances of her falling in love are indicating that love and affection have an important space in her life that are needed to be fulfilled by someone whether it is man or woman. “All she wanted was for him to start so that the world could fall away, and she is lost. This is love, she told herself no wonder they talk so much about it.” (25)

Asth a is not able to respond to the world continuously changing around her. So, unintentionally, she locks herself in the bathroom and rejects the search of the suitor by her mother.

The mother finally gave up, leaving Astha collapsed against the bathroom door, tears falling, crying, crying for Bunty, crying for the lack of love in her barren life, crying because she didn’t want to see a dull stolid man in the drawing room who advertised for a wife and asked about sports. (Kapur 21)

The very image of branding herself as a bride filled in her frustration and anger. To kill her emotions and use her remaining energy, she focuses on drawing to express her emotions silently through art. Her involvement in drawing was an indication of another feature of her character. She wants to show her emotions through sketches that can reveal her inner self. Her ideology craves for change in both inner and outer world.

Diary writing, another hobby of Astha, indicates that she is a strong woman. It is never easy to express emotions as it needs a lot of courage to codify them. Having a great courage to do so, she has yet to pay for this as her mother read her diary out in
which she had noted down all her experiences of love and intimacy with Rohan. The love affair between Rohan and Astha ends abruptly when Rohan has to go abroad for higher education that leaves Astha in a state of helplessness and silence. The inner state of Ashta is described thus:

A斯塔 felt hopeless. She sat in silence, next to this boy whom she had thought she knew. The hands that he had used on her body were now clenched around her heart, slowly squeezing, slowly hurting. (Kapur 30)

The destiny of Astha, as other Indian women, lays in getting married; to bear the burden of motherhood and heterosexual relationship. Astha’s suitor was Hemant with whom she got entangled in an arranged marriage. A relationship is something which encloses and limits the space of a woman and her identity due to patriarchal setup and confines them to live in a shadow of another person’s identity and personality. In any case,

A deep seed of happiness settled in the pit of her stomach, she was married she didn’t have to be the focus of her parent’s anxieties any longer. She was now a homemaker in her own right, a grown woman, experiencing her first plane ride.’ (Kapur 37)

A斯塔 is happy because she thinks that she has achieved what she aspired. The acknowledged notion of heterosexuality, as promoted by culture, gives her happiness. She is not aware of her true sense of sexuality. Her parents are no more anxious because their daughter follows the parameters of the society regarding sexuality.

Bearing the burden of motherhood, (although this is an indication of power and uniqueness as advocated by cultural feminists), along with the household duties and fulfilling the traditional demands of the family and society, Astha’s life has become dull and boring. Here, Kapur has taken a radical view of motherhood that perceives it a tool of patriarchy to supress women.
Dullness enters Astha’s married life. She is able to do nothing when Hemant is not at home. Restlessness prevails in her life, she is free for most of the time as her in-laws were not demanding any work from her. There was no household chores to do. Even after the birth of her children, she had a sense of emptiness in her life. Even the feeling of motherhood failed to fulfil the vacant space of her life.

It is an indication that she is not a conventional kind of wife or mother who obeys everyone. She is a New Woman. To escape loneliness and dullness, she joins a school as a teacher. The profession that is so gendered has been imposed on her by her family members. Even in that restricted job, she flourishes her vision and inner strength. Her thoughts are now invaded by the girls of the school.

Being torn between her obligation and accountability, belief and fact, community code and individual integrities, she contemplates that an exhausted woman cannot be a good wife. To fill the vacant space of her life, she turns to be a writer to express her feelings and continuously struggles for emotional freedom. Her verse, “Changes” very strikingly conveys her discomfort, desire and fortitude:

The eventual release from pain
In the tearing relentless separation
From those in habit loved …
I would never suffer again
But no matter how many times
I heave the doorway of my soul
To let the chill light in
The darkness grows silently
To hide me in the break of day. (81)
The pressure of work creates a distance between Astha and Hemant. A desire for emotional support emerges in Astha’s life due to this distance. Astha’s desire for him becomes feeble. She feels emotionless, dull, and dissociated from him. She is willing to be with him while thinking about him, but nothing of this gets reciprocated. Hemant is, like an offender, extinguishing her expectation and corrupting her contentment.

The desire for love and care increases in Astha’s life after the death of her father. Hemant supported her but the gap gets intensified when she desperately wanted a boy. She gives birth to a boy who gets preference over the daughter: Anuradha. It shows that Hemant belongs to an orthodox family. Gender discrimination is clearly visible not just on intellectual level but in their deeds also. They celebrated the naming ceremony of the boy on a much grander scale than that of the girl. “A crucial theme in second wave criticism became the idea that literature presents gender discriminations and inequalities as the product of the individual psyche rather than the playing out of a socially allotted role”. (Humm 10)

The emotional and physical need of Astha have been increasing day by day as Hemant is not able to understand. He does not pay attention to it and spends most of his time on work. She is getting frustrated and it is shown as

Yes, you did, you did, you did. But now it’s all changed, and I want to bang my head against the wall because you never understand anything. I thought you might help me in deciding what to do with them,’ she said tense and calm. (Kapur 81)

Not just the neglect of Hemant but the decision of her mother, to move to the Haridwar instead of being with her, disturbs her. Due to the lack of mental and physical support from Hemant’s family Astha is unconsciously, forced to search a new person or an event to fill the empty space of her life. She also faces rejection from her own daughter
who refuses to perform in a drama and instead of doing that she prefers to go abroad. When she demanded to go abroad she was criticised by Hemant for being selfish. Such incidents in the family raise a question on her existence.

Hemant’s behaviour is like that of a patriarch that shocks her. She, who thought that Hemant would help her, gets nothing at last. She wished that Hemant would be her companion but he refused to be that. She trusts in the household duty and responsibility that family fosters in female child. She believes that the notion of equality may communicate better than a dominant and dominated. Her periodic headache is another thing that accelerates her struggles.

Her internal turmoil and mission of achieving individuality drives her to "The Street Theatre Group". She meets Aijaz who is a teacher of History and an originator of the theatre group. The respect given to her by Aijaz is reversed in the form of attraction and care but she stops herself from falling in love with him because she is not only a married woman but also a mother of two children. The solitude of her life leads her to Aijaz’s attraction. The empty space in Astha’s life, created by Hemant, is filled by Aijaz.

Aijaz could have fallen in love with Aijaz but she did not because she had already been in a heterosexual relation with her husband. She wants to fill the empty space of her life through love of a different kind. An emotional bond with Aijaz helps her open a new area in her life: one in which she is able to connect with him not on a physical level but on a spiritual level. This new relationship adds a new dimension in her life and perception as she starts taking interest in history and social issues that directly affects humanity.

Aijaz is fully occupied with her work of art. Because of this, it is not possible for her to focus on family and home. Hemant ends the relationship in barrenness.
encouraging her to surrender these engagements. However, Astha rejects the idea as she needs her own space, self-autonomy and self-satisfaction.

She takes an active part in procession, rallies, or Manch related to Aijaz, forgetting the rules and regulations of a middle-class family. In other words being a woman of the 21st century, she doesn't care for such limitation. (Kapur 171)

Asthा’s new identity encounters a new responsibility as she indulges in writing and preparing slogans, songs and painting. The new responsibility not only adds new features to her identity but also shows an emergence of a woman breaking free and defying the traditional image of a woman: one that gives preference to household chores over everything else. Astha does the very same thing, as Hemant questiones, “you seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman in the house not on the streets.”(Kapur 172)

Hemant who is a patriarch cannot bear the breaking of this moral code and conduct by his wife, so he raises the question and expresses frustration. Astha is untouched by the change in her husband’s attitude and behaviour. She has got a new space and individuality through the Manch that has also given her a new identity in society which she is not willing to forsake. She is attached to her achievements which she got after much effort and hard work.

But she was not yet enough of a painter to risk giving up a job she had for ten years. It represented security, not perhaps of money, but of her own life, of a place where she could be herself. (Kapur 149)

The sudden demise of Aijaz, in a sectarian assault, starts a politicization that takes firm hold. Astha begins to utilize her speciality to raise funds for the political gathering in
the memory of Aijaz’s. K.K. Singh, observing Astha and Peeplika’s relationship, presents it in a negative light.

Asth a and Pipee relationship has been presented in the mode of possibility, particularly in the state of dissatisfaction, depression and bewilderment. Physical relationship between two women is something very uncommon in traditional Indian society. But Kapur makes such human relationships visible in the fast changing Indian society in general. (Singh 36)

Singh calls this relationship a “kind of unnatural relationship” (Singh 49). He misunderstands the sexual urges for the same sex as unnatural. This binary of natural and unnatural is no more accepted in the postmodern reading of the text. Feminists have been working to dismantle these binaries that creates hierarchy and trying to make an equal and just equitable world for both women and men. In his analysis he misses the positivity of the relation which Kapur wants to depict.

Asth a and Pipeelika shared much time together. Their relationship flourished in intimacy very early. “When the boundaries of what might be considered normal interaction passed, she started to lie. Thus an element of secrecy entered the relationship and gave it an illicit character.” (Kapur 218)

Asth a, a married woman, walks away from heterosexuality by engaging in a homosexual relationship. Kapur gives a detailed description of their intimate moments. While depicting such moments she uses complete sentences, no syntactical changes, no ellipses and without showing any doubt or hesitation in terms of expressing the special bond between two women. She holds the authority of the narrator very aptly and balances the character’s voice with that of the narrator. This style of representation
shows that she wants to present the relationship in a positive light. By using the above mentioned writing techniques she leaves very little space for any negative interpretation. The excerpt is thus:

Are we going to do mirror on the wall/who is the fairest one of all?, laughed Astha nervously. She often felt an underlying tension when talking to Pipee, as they swooped and dived among their lives, offering bits to the other to share. “A modern version of it”, said Pipee putting on the light and pushing Astha’s head gently forwards. “Look”. Astha tried to turn away. “I do not like looking at my face, especially so close.” Then she felt Pipee’s hand in her hair, her hair undone, her hands framing the oval of her face. Lightly from behind she traced her eyebrows with her fingers, her nose, cheeks and mouth. (Kapur 221)

The very first line of the above mentioned paragraph takes readers into the imaginary world of woman’s beauty. The imagination is confronted with reality by the character, Pipeelika, not by Kapur who releases the authoritative voice and let the characters do the action and speak for themselves. They build up a conversation directly which reflect their authority over their sexual expression. They try to formulate a discourse of sexual expression to address the absence of women’s experience in the existing discourse of sexuality by intermingling the myth and reality. It supplements the grand sexual narrative of dominance and subservience with women’s experience.

This conversation also throws light on Astha’s and Pipeelika’s characters. Astha reflects feminine traits while Pipeelika holds some masculine traits which dilutes the constructed gendered identity of men and women. There is a co-existence of masculinity and femininity in Pipeelika. A new kind of female representation is visible as Pipeelika
has incorporated masculinity. She parades physical power which is a common practice among males.

Pipee took a firmer grip of the hand in hers, and turned it over, stroking the back of it, gently sliding her ring off, and putting them on her fingers, manoeuvring her bangles off and slipping them on to her own more narrow wrist. (Kapur 222)

The above mentioned excerpt continues the theme of Pipeelika’s masculinity. She celebrates the characteristics which has conservatively been implied as masculine—‘firmer grip’, ‘stroking’, ‘pushing’, ‘hands framing’. She is functioning like a surrogate male although masculinity does not denote constructed ‘manliness’. The bearer of the male gaze, Pipeelika, enjoys the masculine sexual practice.

All the better, murmured Pipee even more softly. Her breath quickened, and she pressed the tips of Astha’s fingers into her mouth, sucking each one gently before letting them go. Astha hardly dared breathe. (Kapur 222)

Pipeelika’s removal of Astha’s ornaments symbolises the rejection of patriarchal tools which control women’s sexuality. Astha complains to Pipeelika that she looks so bare without bangles. Being out of her marital bond she finds herself unprotected because marriage is always perceived as a secure space for women. Their relationship is a refusal of sexual hierarchy and binaries of male/female, superior/inferior. It is a relation between equals. The equality which is denied in heterosexual relation has been exercised here. The love between them is increasing day by day.

And days when she did not see or talk to her were days with something missing, and not even extra hours at the canvas could fill the vacuum
Astha felt. She started to fantasize about touching her, imagined her hair between her fingers, her skin beneath her own, her hands on the back of her neck. (Kapur 225)

A final short passage describes the erotic features of their friendship. Astha and Pipeelika’s bodies are actively involved in sensual relationship full of desire. Their bodies have not been objectified, as happens in male writing,

Pipee put her arms around her. She could feel her hands on the narrowness of her back, on the beginning spread of her lips. Gently she undid her blouse, and her bra, looking at her face as she did so and slowly she continued, feeling her back with her palm, coming round up towards her breasts, feeling their softness, especially where her nipples were, feeling them again and again, in no hurry to reach any conclusion. They were enclosed in a circle of silence, the only sound, the sound of their breasts, close together and mingled. (Kapur 230-31)

This relationship filled confidence in Astha. She feels empowered by rejecting male sexual supremacy. She enjoys intimacy with a woman and seeks for independence. As she says to Hemant, “I am thirty six. I need to be independent. I am always adjusting to everybody else’s need” (Kapur 227) Pipeelika also seems satisfied and freer than before.

In between they talked, the talk of discovery and attraction, of the history of a pleasure. They both reject the femininity and its passivity, a constructed characteristics attached to it. This three months relationship, the teasing and pleasure of an intimacy that was complete and absolute, expressed through minds as much as bodies. (Kapur 231)
Asthा asserts new territory of her sexual expression with the help of Pipeelika without falling into the dilemma being just or unjust. Enjoying everything, she becomes more aggressive in the quest of sexual enjoyment which brings sourness in her heterosexual relationship with Hemant. She becomes suspicious of Hemant’s commitment. An excerpt from the novel would show the conflict between them.

Sweetheart, why do you upset over nothing? You are my wife, I love you, and there has never been another women for me, never. On business trips people don’t understand. Commitments to wife and family, they assume their clients want a good time. If I had sex, would the condom not have used? You only tell me; he whispered his hands fallings to her breasts and circling them in the way that was so familiar. (Kapur 224)

Moreover, Astha cannot depend on her relationship with Peeplika; rather, she would live as an adoring mother and dedicated spouse. The writer exhibits the entire debate about homo and hetero sexual relationship from an intellectual’s perspective. Kapur advocates pluralistic, worldwide culture. She rejects any label and even does not try to give a term to their relationship. It is a way to liberate relationship from any categorization.

The returning of Astha to the family life symbolizes the submissiveness of her character that is also found in the other characters of Kapur’s if it is observed from a general view. The protest of the protagonist is actually a tiny protest as she achieves little at the end. As explained by Chandra Bhusan Singh:

Asthा, to be too submissive, too bound by expectations, not aiming too high enough with her ambitions and being miserable without quite understanding why; but here is exactly where Kapur sticks to the truth.
These limited rebellions, this desire for career or artistic endeavor or fulfilled love or some form of self-satisfaction through other means than their household bind her heroines together into a single narrative history of passive Indian women kind in the 20th century. (Singh 27)

This submissiveness in character coaxes her into dilemma. When she compares herself to Pipeelika she cannot find herself as free as Pipeelika is. She is a mother, a wife, and has a family to take care of. Despite all these thoughts she prefers the company of Pipeelika. Her dilemma is encoded by Kapur in this way:

She succumbed to panic, she was a mother, nothing should disturb that. For a brief and guilty moment she wished she was like Pipee, alone and free, but she checked herself. A large part of her belonged to her children that was how she lived her life...she was a wife too, but not much of her was required there. (Kapur 231)

Pipeelika was familiar with Astha’s situation that the latter was a wife and a mother. She knew that it would not be easy for Astha to leave such things and to make a decision about their relationship. She was willing to give Astha ample time to think over it. She expresses her feelings to Astha thus:

Leaving marriage, even like yours, could not be easy. I do feel that away from that house and those people you will be able to lead a fuller life. You have so much in you, so much to give, but take your time, whatever you do it will be all right. (Kapur 243)

Prominent feminist critics Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer believe that popular culture objective, in the foremost, is to confine women’s sexuality to marriage and family life. That is true in Indian context also. Astha’s relationship with Pipeelika
which is beyond the restricted area of marriage and family life does not get validity. They build a relationship that breaks the myth of popular culture about women’s sexuality. Demystification of woman’s sexuality is possible only due to the education and consciousness-raising. The knowledge and awareness of woman’s sexual expression work as agencies of change. Such notions also serve as a theme to the novel and has been a formative issue in the development of characters of the novel.

Women’s desire is an unknown territory for male imagination that is called a ‘Dark Continent’ (Fraud 212) by Sigmund Fraud. It a space of women sexuality that is unexplored. Kapur, through the characters of Astha and Pipeelika, attempts to explore this territory which Freud argues,

[P]sychoanalysts to travel to these metaphorical dark places of femininity in human psyche, and “report on their finding”. Dark Continents thus represents a mysterious, unexplored region which, though originally related to feminine sexuality, has the potential to spread across several disciplines. (Bhattacharya XIII)

The returning of Astha is an answer to the argument that is labelled against Indian Feminism by traditionalists who say that it takes away Indian women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities. Astha accepts Indian culture, which identifies the larger values on accommodation and cooperation, as opposed to confrontation and categorical choice.

Asthा’s search for identity got diverted while engaging in relationships with different people. In a patriarchal society women get identified with respect to whosoever they are related to, they are called ‘daughter’, ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ when they are related with father, husband and son respectively. The search of a new identity in relations
resulted into many changes for Astha, from boyfriends to husband, and even with another woman with whom she shared an emotional and physical bonding that remained secret. The relationship between woman and woman provides an alternative which ameliorates and empowers the woman outside the system of marriage.

Kapur refrains herself from imposing any lesbian identity on Astha because in poststructuralist perspective the self is fragmented as it serves as an antithesis to any constructed identity. In the light of this notion Kapur is unable to give a concrete identity and term to explain and justify the relationship between Astha and Pipeelika.

Kapur has taken a middle path of radical feminism and lesbian feminism to formulate and address the issues of women in Indian context through the relationship of Astha and Pipeelika. Radical feminism positions itself against male dominance:

[P]atriarchy is very hard to eradicate because its root -- the belief that women are different and inferior -- is deeply embedded in most men's consciousness. It can best be resisted, radical feminists argued, by forming non-hierarchical, supportive, woman-only spaces where women can think and act and create free of constant sexist put-downs, sexual harassment, and the threat of rape and violence. (Lorber 16-17)

Abolition of patriarchal notion of woman’s sexuality is hard and producing a counter narrative is somewhat problematic as society favours patriarchal narratives. Women are always perceived as passive in their sexuality and language used by them does not show any authority. There is always a lack of complete sentences in women’s speech which demonstrates the lack of confidence in their personality. Women tend to use subordinate sentences which support the main idea. Main clause talks about the main idea or new idea but women are deliberately denied from using the main clause to keep them on the margin in the male written text. Women’s speech is shown with a lot of
incomplete sentences, gaps and ellipses that reflect the lack of authority. Kapur, through her characters, attempts to counter the above mentioned charges with the help of lesbian feminism. Lesbian feminism reasons:

Lesbian feminism takes the radical feminist pessimistic view of men to its logical conclusion. If heterosexual relationships are intrinsically exploitative because of men's social, physical, and sexual power over women, why bother with men at all? ...Stop sleeping with the "enemy," and turn to other women for sexual love as well as for intellectual companionship and emotional support. (Lorber 19)

The rejection of man is a core issue of radical feminism and that is converted into the reality by lesbian feminism. Astha and Pipeelika reject their male counterparts and take authority over their sexual expression. This is not just rejection of male but also an attempt to acquire the space which was denied to them by patriarchy. But Astha’s returning to the family and accepting the hegemony of her husband raises a question on her identity as a lesbian. She is bisexual woman who has relationship with both man and woman. Women, with such bisexual identity, are perceived as a threat to the utopian world which is dreamt by radical and lesbian feminists. Astha’s sexual identity is ambiguous and remains questionable as in theory.

Women bisexuals who have sexual relations with both women and men, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes serially, disturb the gender and sexual dichotomies that are the basis for lesbian feminism. Their presence has been severely resisted in many lesbian communities, but they have become a contradiction not yet resolved in lesbian feminism. (Lorber 19)
The relationship of Astha and Pipeelika marginalises men, not only sexually but also, by putting their experience as the theme and in the core of the story which is a conclusion of radical feminist demands by lesbian feminism. Their separation at the end and Astha’s return to home indicate a balanced view taken by the writer to justify and contextualized the Western theories and themes in Indian context.
Works Cited


