Chapter - 3
MANJU KAPUR: HER LIFE AND WORKS
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Indian English literature is enjoying prestigious status in recent times especially in the field of fiction. There are many writers pouring their heart out for their literary output. Women novelists have also grown up like never before. There are few current women novelists who have contributed a lot to Indian English literature with their creative genius. One such gem is Manju Kapur. She is a prominent Indian woman novelist writing in English.

Manju Kapur, born in 1948, is from Amritsar, Punjab. She graduated from the Miranda House University College for Women, Delhi. Then she moved to Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada to pursue her M.A. in English. She completed her M.Phil from Delhi University where she was a professor of English. Her childhood was spent in America and Canada as her father worked in the cultural attaché in the Indian Embassy there. She is married to Gun Nidhi Dalmia, and has three children. She lives in Delhi.

Manju Kapur has written five full length novels. She has also written *Shaping the World: Women Writers on Themselves* (2014). It is an account of writers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka - acclaimed both nationally and internationally. They all share their insecurities and triumphs that occurred on their journey to become creative writers. It is an anthology of intimate, honest and brave accounts that provides the reader with an insight into the realm of writing, its adventurous terrain of highs and lows and how it continues
to shape these twenty four women and the world we live in. The leading women writers are Ameena Hussein, Amruta Patil, Anita Nair, Anjum Hasan, Anuradha Marwah, Bapsi Sidhva, Bina Shah, Jaishree Misra, Janice Pariat, Kavery Nambisan, Lavanya Shankaran, Maniza Naqvi, Manju Kapur, Meira Chand, Mishi Saran, Moni Mohsin, Namita Devidayal, Ru Freeman, Shashi Deshpande, Shinie Antony, Susan Visvanathan, Tania James and Tishani Doshi.

Now let us discuss her all novels in brief.

**Difficult Daughters (1998)**

Manju Kapur published her well-known novel *Difficult Daughters* in 1998. This is Manju Kapur's first novel. It is partially based on Manju Kapur's life. It was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book for Eurasian region in 1999. It also enjoyed the status of being a number one best seller book in India. It has earned lots of success both in India and abroad, rewarded critically and commercially. It has been translated in many Indian and foreign languages. It was translated into Spanish by Dora Sales Salvador in 2003. Manju Kapur presents the fictional and reconstructed story of an urban upper-middle class Arya Samaj Punjabi family living in Amritsar. In an interview Manju Kapur says, "The most readable novel published in 1998, it is the result of five years of research at Nehru Museum and Library at Teen Murti and was rewritten eight times. I had initially named this novel "Partition" but changed it on the suggestion
of my publisher." (Interview) It involved a lot of hard work. Manju Kapur says, "I had to rewrite the book eight times over seven years. And each time I thought I had finished the book." (Interview) When Manju Kapur did not find any suitable publisher in India, she approached Faber and Faber in England. They publish it after a few changes. The novel showcases the skill of Manju Kapur in delineating the world of women with acute understanding of the social milieu of the time. Bhagpat Nayak rightly observes about different themes in Difficult Daughters:

Difficult Daughters presents larger issues of patriarchy, which denies woman's voice and freedom set around at the time of partition." "....the novelist expresses her absorbing ideas of woman relationship, woman sexuality, love, infatuation, jealousy, marriage, gender roles, self-discovery, and other problems with intelligence and sympathy. (Nayak, 209)

Difficult Daughters portrays the women who want to assert their right and establish their own identity in patriarchal society. The novel not only describes India's independence-partition time but also independence of women from conventional and patriarchal bondages. Sunita Sinha rightly states:

Kapur speaks of the idea of independence - independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and also independence yearned after by a woman. (Sinha, 161)
Ira Pande describes the cover page of the novel in the following manner:

*Manju Kapur's book first holds your attention with its cover, which has a stunning portrait of a young woman circa the '50s with large limpid eyes and a gaze that looks beyond. How many such photographs one has seen framed in silver in affluent middle class homes in north India. Tinged with sepia, these portraits show you the mistress of the home in her prime. Such is Virmati, the protagonist.*

(Pande, 22)

*Difficult Daughters* presents the theme of partition as an undercurrent plot throughout. According to the back cover of the novel, it is set around the time of partition and written with unimaginable intelligence and sympathy. Manju Kapur has covered a long span of time when the Britishers were the rulers and India was witnessing a horrifying era of revolution and bloodbath. The incidents in the novel are woven majestically with the theme of partition.

*Difficult Daughters* portrays three generations of women. The first generation is associated closely to the welfare of the family, child producing-rearing and attached with traditional and conservative outlook towards life. The second generation is liberated, educated, falling in love and modern in outlook and thinking. The third generation is barren - without child and divorced. The three generations are represented by Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. The story is narrated through Ida, daughter of Virmati, who is never told about the
past of her mother. Her relatives give one view of her mother but she wants to know another. Virmati is a difficult daughter of Kasturi while Ida is a difficult daughter of Virmati. The clashes between mother-daughter are depicted in the background of a patriarchal society. The novel opens with the frank declaration of Ida, the narrator:

**The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother.**

**Now she was gone and I stared at the fire that rose from her shriveled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half dead myself, while my relatives clustered around the pyre and wept.**

*(Difficult Daughters, 1)*

Ida undertakes a journey to know her mother’s past. The name Ida implies a new state of consciousness, a fresh beginning. (Prasad, 163) Through Ida's frank confession in the beginning we come across the problem of generation gap and defiant. She wants to be different from her mother. New generation defies the conventions of the old generation. Virmati defies Kasturi and Ida defies Virmati. The story revolves around these three women with partition in its background.

Suraj Prakash and Kasturi are Virmati’s parents. They have as many as eleven children. There are six girls and five boys - Virmati, Indumati, Gunavati, Hemavati, Vidyavati, Parvati. Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishanath, Prakashnathand and Hiranath. Virmati is the eldest of them. Virmati moves to Dalhousie along with her mother. Being eldest she has to look after the household works and rearing of her young brothers and sisters. She is indispensible for them. Virmati is fond of study. Kasturi is a traditional woman. Virmati is sometimes
taunted by her mother Kasturi when Virmati becomes tired, "You are eldest. If you don't see to things, who will?" (Difficult Daughters, 7)

Kasturi doesn't want eleventh child to be born. She always prays for miscarriage. She is now tired by the burden of her carrying a baby in womb for nine months. Her Sister-in-law Lajwanti always taunts her regarding her multiple pregnancies. Lajwanti comes to Kasturi's home to help her as her health is not good. Shakuntala is Lajwanti's unmarried daughter and Virmati's cousin. She is a role model for Virmati. It is after meeting with Shakuntala and knowing her outlook towards life that Virmati decides to study further. Shakuntala is pursuing M.Sc. in Chemistry in Lahore.

As Virmati fails in her FA exams, she returns to Amritsar on the advice of her parents. They don't want Virmati to study further. Around this time, a professor of English comes to live in Virmati's house as a paying guest with family. He is married. He is an Oxford return, with scholastic appearance, he teaches English to Virmati. From this point onwards Virmati's long road for tragic life begins. Ganga's husband is a professor.

Virmati takes admission in AS College after much toil. Harish turns Virmati into an enlightened and educated girl. Once she begins her journey towards her married lover, she does not even bother to establish immoral and illicit relations with him. She forgets everything while devoting herself to Harish. She even improperly handles her basic responsibilities. The love story of Virmati and Harish is given ample space in the novel. A marriage proposal of a canal engineer
Inderjeet comes for Virmati meanwhile. But she refuses to accept it as she was tangled in love web of Professor. She feels suffocated when she hears the news of Ganga's pregnancy. She decides to start her studies again. She writes to Harish that:

*I am going to Lahore to do my BT. I want to be a teacher like you and Shakuntala Pehnji. Perhaps my family will also benefit by what I do, as yours has done. As for me, I never stopped learning from you, whether it was in the classroom or outside. Mati says at least I wouldn't be at home to remind her off the eternal disgrace I am to everybody. I too, want a fresh start. It will be a great relief for me to leave this house. May be Bade Baoji will consent to come here after I have gone.* (Difficult Daughters, 107-08).

She starts a meaningful life in Lahore with her roommate Swarna Lata. Swarna Lata is an active participant in the political and social movements of the day. Virmati is so much impressed by Swarna Lata that she praises her to Shakuntala in the following manner:

*Fancy Pehnji going so much by looks. Anybody would be impressed by Swarna's eyes behind her glasses, eyes that refused to smile just because they were looked at. And what about the intelligence in her round face, and the friendliness that frank and open?* (Difficult Daughters, 119)
But, the professor's thoughts keep circling around her mind. Harish comes to meet her in Lahore. Virmati gets pregnant. She aborts her child by managing a gold bangle from her father. Harish enjoys with her but he neither takes the responsibility of the child and nor the abortion. After this depressing incident she ends her relation with Harish. But Harish wrote many letters to Virmati to convince her. There were many tricks he used to win her confidence.

*He used different names, different references that he was sure she would understand. He said he would risk everything to come and see her: 'My parents are unwilling to send me to Lahore to study further, but when a girl has been educated so far, it is foolish to not pursue the subject, and I am so far determined that nothing should stop me. What do you think, Virmati?' was how he put it.*

(*Difficult Daughters*, 121)

Harish convinces her and then they starts meeting. After some time she goes to Sirmaur, a hill station in Nahan to become a principal in Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya. Harish comes to meet her in Nahan also. They meet secretly in Virmati's room in the dark night. But as the news flatters in the air and Virmati loses her employee's confidence and leaves the job. She decides to go to Shantiniketan and wants to forget Harish for her own good. But she goes to Harish's friends' home in Delhi. Her dream of spiritual awakening and of renowned autonomy fades. She marries Harish.
Virmati is ignored and has to face tough gestures and gibes of family members. She is not only a difficult daughter but also difficult in-law. Harish is Oxford educated Professor in Amritsar's college. Though he is highly educated, in his outlook he seems to be an orthodox man. Harish gets angry when her mother, Kishori Devi rebukes him for her second marriage. He shouts and says:

*I do what I can for everybody. But, to satisfy all of you, I am supposed to live my life tied to a woman with whom I have nothing in common. Who cannot even read. Who keeps a ghunghat in front of my friends.* (Difficult Daughter, 209)

Even after her marriage with Harish, Virmati’s suffering continues. She feels that she is a caged bird. She acquires only a marginal apace in the house. She is not allowed to do house-hold chores as she is a second wife of Harish. At home she finds that everything from washing his clothes to polishing his shoes, taking care of her precious books, feeling an empty fountain pen, mending of his clothes, stitching of his shirts and kurtas - Ganga did it all.

Elleke Boehmer writes,

*After her marriage, Virmati is symbolically cast out of her mother's house and forced to find her own way. Her punishing exile ends only when the massacres of partition make her family's continuing rejection untenable. It is a sign of Virmati's marginality.* (Boehmer, 57)
When Harish's poet friends come to home Ganga made samosas, kachoris, pakoras and many other things. Virmati is left with no scope by Ganga in kitchen and home also. Reena Mitra asserts, "Unfortunately, however, the assertive and resolute Virmati never blossoms to the full." (Mitra, 78) Virmati's mother, father and grandfather are terribly shocks on knowing about Virmati's marriage with a married man. Kasturi knows the impact of Virmati's deed on Lala Diwan Chand family as she brings a black spot on her family. She harshly rebukes Virmati in great angst:

You've destroyed our family, you badmash, you randi!
You've blackened our face everywhere! For this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on our family, shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji! But what do you care, brazen that you are! (Difficult Daughters, 221)

Even after her marriage with Harish her sense of fulfillment is not met, as Harish still teaches her about how to act in life. Virmati gets only a marginal space in the house. Harish turns a deaf when she complains. He diverts her attention by complementing her as his educated companion. On her mother-in-law is trying to take some interest in her as she becomes pregnant. But for Virmati fate doesn't cease to show its turbulence. The attention and affection that she now begins to enjoy from her mother-in-law also come to an abrupt end with her traumatic abortion. Virmati is not responsible for her miscarriage. She is craving to be a mother but fate denies. Harish's behaviour with her is patronizing and domineering. It enmeshed
Virmati completely. Her love for study has blown away completely. On the other hand, she wants to visit her patriarchal home, the words like 'badmas' and 'randi' are uttered by her mother. Virmati also thinks that a woman's happiness lies in giving her husband happiness. Harish decides to send her to Lahore to do MA in Philosophy - a subject which is dull, abstract and meaningless according to Virmati. And when she returns, she comes to know that her all family members have gone out because of communal tension. After sometime Virmati finds herself pregnant again. Her mother-in-law advises her to sleep with her instead of Harish. Finally the baby girl is born and is named 'Bharati' by Virmati. But Harish rejects it and says:

_I don’t wish our daughter to be tainted with the birth of our country. What birth is this? With so much hatred? We haven’t been born. We have moved back into the dark ages. Fighting, killing over religion. Religion of all things. Even the educated. This is madness, not freedom. And I never ever wish to be reminded of it._ (Difficult Daughters, 276)

Then the girl is named Ida because Harish has its own meaning. Ida wants to live by her own terms. Ida protests when her mother asks her not to disappoint your father, she rebelled by saying, "Why it is so important to please him?" It is a repetition of difficulty, first it was Kasturi and Virmati now it is Virmati and Ida. The agony and anger of Ida is captured by Manju Kapur in the epilogue of the novel:
I grew up struggling to be the model daughter. Pressure, pressure to perform day and night. My father liked me looking pretty, neat and well-dressed, with kaajal and a little touch of oil in my sleeked-back hair. But the right appearance was not enough. I had to do well in school, learn classical music, take dance lessons so that I could convert my clumsiness into grace, read all the classics of literature, discuss them intelligently with him, and then exhibit my accomplishments graciously before his assembled guests at parties.

My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older; she said it was for my own good. As a result, I am constantly looking for escape routes.

Of course, I made a disastrous marriage. My mother spent the period after my divorce coating the air I breathed with sadness and disapproval. ‘What will happen to you after I am gone?’ was her favourite lament. I was nothing, husbandless, childless. I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society.

For long periods I was engulfed by melancholy, depression, and despair. I would lie in bed for hours, unable to sleep, pitying myself for all I didn’t have, blaming my mother, myself. Now her shadow no longer threatens me. Without the hindrance of her presence, I can sink into her past and make it mine. In searching for a
woman I could know, I have pieced together material from memories that were muddled, partial and contradictory. The places I visited, the stuff I read tantalized me with fragments that I knew I would not be able fully to reconstruct. Instead, I imagined histories, rejecting the material that didn't fit, moulding ruthlessly the material that did. All through, I felt the excitement of discovery, the pleasure of fitting narratives into a discernible inheritance. This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore." (Difficult Daughters, 279-280)

**A Married Woman (2002)**

*A Married Woman* is a second novel of Manju Kapur. It deals with the assumption that women insist on liberation from patriarchal social structure and thinking. Manju Kapur's novels are continuously looking for freedom from social and moral constraints. Through this novel Kapur offers fascinating glimpses into the workings of a woman's mind as she struggles to come out from a patriarchal world. Manju Kapur's preoccupation with the female revolt against age old customs, traditions and the institution of marriage is portrayed by her in this novel. It also tackles with the real issues such as demolition of Babri Masjid. According to Sunita Sinha:
Kapur's novel explores the twin explosive subjects of sexual intimacy between women and Hindu Muslim confrontation against a backdrop of respectable middle class Delhi life. (Sinha, 165)

It also peeps into the lesbian relationship. She is the first Indian English novelist to use it. In this respect, Ashok Kumar asserts:

"In A Married Woman, the age-old themes of marriage and politics are coupled with lesbian relationship, in the narrative making Kapur the first Indian English novelists to highlight women's desire for homosexuality. (Kumar, 138)"

A Married Woman carries the study of Astha's life from her childhood to forties. The background of this novel is set up in Delhi against the controversial Ram Janma Bhoomi and Babri Masjid. Manju Kapur opens the novel with the description of Astha, "Asthia was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear...She was her parents' only child. Her education, her character, her health, her marriage, these were their burdens." (A Married Woman, 1) She is brought up in traditional and homely surroundings. For her parents she is a burden. He mother often declares:

"When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth? (A Married Woman, 1)"
Her father is a bureaucrat. According to Astha's father if she does well in her final exams then she can sit for IAS only to find a good husband for her daughter. He doesn't want her to be like him, dissatisfied and wasted. He thinks Astha has lots of potentials such as— you draw, you paint, you read, you have a way with words, you do well academically. He adds, "You must sit for the competitive exams. With a good job comes independence." (A Married Woman, 4) Throughout his life he took care of her daughter's education. After his death Astha remembers him very much. Astha fell in with Bunty, an Army Cadet at NDA, Kharakwasla. At that time Astha was in her teens. They write letters to each other. Astha is a seen boasting to her friends about her relation with Bunty. It was after Astha's mother complains to Bunty's parents that the matter ended. Astha's second affair begins with Rohan. She begins to meet him in his car at the dark corner of the street. Sometimes they cross their limits while playing with each other. It can be seen by the following line, "All she wanted was for him to start, so that the world could fall away, and she be lost. This is love, she told herself, no wonder they talk so much about it." (A Married Woman, 24-25) But after few months, Rohan departs to Oxford for further studies. It forces her to end her relation with him. Astha writes her diary daily. She pours out her emotions in her diary. Her mother reads her diary but she told her that it is an imaginative thought for her story in college. But her mother thinks that the Convent education has spoiled the imagination of a young girl.
When Rohan goes abroad, Astha takes admission in MA programme. She is now bored and unenthusiastic. She supposes that a woman like her should choose teaching as a career. She has few friends during her MA. Manju Kapur writes while a marriage proposal for Astha arrives:

Asth was in her final year when the proposal came. The MBA, foreign-returned son of one of the bureaucrats who lived in the larger houses bordering Lodhi colony, had seen her wanted to meet her. His father dropped in on them, and acquainted the parents with their good fortunes.

(A Married Woman, 33)

Hemant is an MBA from America and doing a job of an Assistant Manager in a bank in Delhi. He seems to be an ideal and honest husband in the beginning of their married life. They go to Srinagar for their honeymoon. Their first consummation takes place in a houseboat on Dal Lake. Manju Kapur depicts their sweet time in Srinagar, "He took her hands and put them on his chest. She undid the buttons, and slid his shirt off. As he lifted his arms for her to remove his vest, the hair of his underarms sprang out at her, along with the smell of him."

(A Married Woman, 38) He usually calls her 'my baby'. He performs well in assisting his bed with Astha. Astha is feeling very nice about her early romantic married life. After few months her married life shows the signs of dullness. She has to wait for Hemant all the time as nothing proper to do. On the advice of her mother, she decides to be a teacher. Her in-laws also approve of her job as it is a good pass-time
for married women. Now she has to wake up early, and also check lessons of students.

One has to accept realities of life instead romantic thoughts. After the death of his father, Astha spends her evenings with her mother for cheering her up. She also asks for Hemant's help for her mother. Since Hemant remains very busy with his office works, Astha keeps herself busy with her school. She doesn't like her teaching job in the beginning. But as the time passes, happiness comes in their life. Astha finds herself pregnant. She is very happy now. Manju Kapur writes about Astha:

_Asta enjoyed every aspect of her pregnancy. As it advanced, she became more and more bucolic. Teaching was an effort, and she had no energy for any extra activity. At home she slept most of the time._ (A Married Woman, 57)

Hemant likes the changes in her wife's body. He says, "My wife is becoming a woman before my very eyes." (A Married Woman, 57) After few months Astha becomes a mother of a sweet girl named Anuradha. But after the birth of Anuradha Hemant's attitude is changed. Hemant argues:

_Why are you so childish? I work hard all day, and when I come home I want to relax. If you are feeling something, tell me. I have no time for all these games...There is nothing wrong with our relationship....You think too much that is the problem._ (A Married Woman, 66)
Then after sometimes Astha gives birth to a baby boy. His naming ceremony is on a higher scale than of Anuradha. He is named Hemant. Manju Kapur tries to present the grim realities of old Indian society. Here most people think that only male child can run the family legacy and not the female. Astha gets busy with her two children and her job. Hemant also succumbs to the compelling necessity of materialistic needs and starts his own factory in the name of Astha. And this makes him all the more busy. Astha complains him as he only talks about business, children and house only. They are not talking with each other as earlier did. Hemant convinces her and promises her to give ample time to family. Astha is now a single mother virtually. Joya Chakravarty asserts:

> What Manju Kapur is hinting at is that had Hemant been more appreciative of and sensitive to his wife's needs, Astha would have felt a more complete woman.

(Chakravarty, 204)

Asth a prefers to continue school job as she has grown well as the right hand of the Principal. At school she is being appreciated and valued for one tenth of the work she does at home. She is suffering from headache due to less communication with Hemant. Astha resumes writing poetry. She is writing because of her distance with Hemant. She is unable to discuss her feelings with him. It always resulted into argument, distance and greater misery. In her poems she treads through the gardens, flowers, plants as well as love rejection and longing. As Hemant proves himself as the greatest money investor, Astha's mother
gives him lots of money for safe investment. Astha doesn't like her mother giving handsome amount of money to Hemant. Astha pays most of her time to her school, poetry and paintings in order to soothe her bruised feelings.

In 1987, Astha's principal, Mrs. Dubey, invites The Street Theatre Group to hold a workshop on their premises. The Steer Theatre Group is run by Aijaz, a theatre personality. He is a lecturer in History and organizes street plays to strengthen communal harmony in the country. He is the master of the weaker nerves of the women and begins shower his praise for them through his poetry, script and painting. She thinks about Aijaz as the only man who can understand and value her. She loves to look at him while he is performing on the stage. Manju Kapur portrays Aijaz's personality in following manner:

*He was of medium height, his body compact. His face was the clear delicate luminous brown of freshly rained-on earth. His lips were a darker brown than his skin, and his eyes were black and narrow. While working he rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, allowing Astha to view at her leisure his round arms, hairless, smooth and muscular. He had prematurely grey hair, which, thick and springy, fell about his face and neck in ways that suggested a good barber.* (A Married Woman, 112-113)

Aijaz touches her on knee. Astha now wants to start an affair with Aijaz, although being a married woman. Kapur captures Astha's feelings about Aijaz:
What did it mean, did he like her, did he want to have an affair with her, why had she been so startled by his hand on her knee, why hadn't she responded, but she was a married woman, with two children and those rights before her eyes. (A Married Woman, 114)

After few months, Astha learns that Aijaz is going around with a woman who's working an NGO. Her name is Pipeelika Trivedi. She lives alone in Delhi. She is living separately with interference of conservative people in her way of life. Her mother is shocked on hearing about her engagement with a Muslim. Her mother is a widow. Pipeelika has one brother named Ajay. After finishing school she goes to Miranda House to do the Honors' Degree in Sociology. She did her MA from the Delhi School of Economics. She joins an NGO named Ujalla. It is run by three women. It helps slum children to get alternative education. She is also blinded by Aijaz personality. Despite everyone's objection, they get married. Sampradayak Mukti Manch organizes long processions, strikes and dharnas to maintain the communal peace. Aijaz doesn't tell his family about his marriage due to communal tension.

One day Hemant is reading a newspaper and he shows the headline to Astha 'Theatre Group Burned Alive in Van." Aijaz was in this van. Tears start flowing from Astha's life on reading about the killing of Aijaz. After overcoming his death, Astha organizes a painting exhibition to pay tribute to Aijaz. It is decided that each painting artist to donate one painting for the exhibition, which will be
held for communal harmony. Now for Astha painting is everything. She develops headache due to no over burden. She also becomes politically active and begins to attend the meetings of the Manch. Now she devotes more time to the cause than to her family. Hemant's dominating attitude, superiority complex over Astha, his arrogant wisdom and lack of interest in her achievements, freezes her completely. He all the time thinks of money.

Asth'a's sufferings alienate her further. As Astha and Pipeelika have same kind of situation and like mindedness, which brings them closer. Both have sound understandings of each other's likes and dislikes. Pilgrimage to Ayodhya brings them more closer. Astha is careful in revealing the amount of time she spends with Pipee. Astha lays her heart while Pipee cures it with sympathy. Astha feels herself stronger and more confident in the company of Pipee. Beating all opposition at home, she goes to Ekta Yatra from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, leaving her children and family behind. They long more for each other during the Ekta Yatra. One day, while taking them, Astha comes to know about Pipee's lesbian relationship. Pipee is in lesbian relation with Neeraj and Sameera. She is completely disillusioned by Pipee's demanding passion and past relations. Now, she hovers over whether to allow herself in an unthinkable love or not. She tells Pipee about her feelings

I love you, you know how much you mean to me, I try and prove it every moment we have together, but I can't abandon my family, I can't. May be I should not have
looked for happiness, but I couldn’t help myself. I suppose you think I should not be in a relationship, but I had not foreseen…… Oh Pipee, I’m sorry I am not like you. (A Married Woman, 242)

Asta feels satisfied with Pipee. She thinks if a husband and a wife are one, than she and Pipee should be even more. For that reason only Astha shares private moments of her life she had never shared with before. Hemant has a heart attack, and it is upon Astha to do her duty to the best of her ability as Hemant is not going change himself. In this regard Manju Kapur writes:

*Asta’s mother was delighted. She wrote from her ashram:*

*God bless you my little one and your family. Poor Hemant needs a break from all his troubles. You do not give him enough attention. Remember men have to bear the burdens of the outside world, home is their refuge. (A Married Woman, 270)*

Every morning she makes sure that they go for a walk. All those unhappiness and sufferings with Hemant affect her a lot:

*Was these where her life had led her, this the space she had travelled between those walks and these? Striding briskly to still the thoughts in her head, speaking to mask the feelings in her heart. She looked at Hemant, swinging his arms, concentrating on getting his heart rate up. Perhaps he was disappointed too, perhaps he had looked for something different in marriage. They didn’t talk about*
such things, she would never know. (A Married Woman, 283)

Pipee criticizes Astha for being a traditional wife. But she feels she is certainly doing what a devoted wife does. She protects her husband's insides. As Pipee goes to US for her Ph.D., she is to become alienated again but she gathers the courage and goes to see her off at the airport. The last few moments between Astha and Pipeelika are captured by Manju Kapur in the following manner:

Pipee propelling her into her car - a last kiss, goodbye, goodbye, take care, and she was lost to the eye even before she had wheeled her trolley through the entrance door. (A Married Woman, 306)

In this way, after seeing Pipeelika off at the airport, Astha returns home. As she feels tired, she goes to sleep. Outwardly she looks same but mechanically she has changed a lot.

Home (2006)

Home is the third novel of Manju Kapur. It deals with the search of a home i.e. search for a place of shelter and security. Unfortunately in India for women, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation. It also does not assure any emotional security to women. Sometimes home does not provide any kind of physical security to women. The novel depicts the story of an ordinary middle class joint family's life in Delhi. As a chronicler of the joint family, Kapur enjoys a respected status in the field of Indian English literature. In her stories of joint
family we find conflicting family members, loyalties, intrigues or tricks, triumphs and tragedies.

Manju Kapur's *Home* is a grand Indian family saga. It tries to explore the complex nature of Indian family. Kapur deals with deep understanding of human nature and shows her maturity as a novelist. In this respect Anupama Chowdhury remarks:

*Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joins families can both destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress.* (Chowdhuri, 33)

In India, women are still victimized in the name of tradition, orthodoxy of religion and familial values. They become victims of mental and physical torture, sexual abuse, rape, dowry and killing. Clara Nubile in *The Danger of Gender* observes:

*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.*

(Nubile, 271)

Manju Kapur begins the novel by describing the values, tradition and name of The Banwari Lal family:

*The Banwari Lal family belonged to a class whose skills had been honed over generations to ensure prosperity in the market-place. Their marriages augmented, their habits conserved. From an early age children were trained to*
The novel presents the simple story of a joint middle class family which runs their cloth business in Delhi. The Lala Banwari Lal is the head of the family. He believes in fate. "Before Partition, his has been one of the largest cloth shops in Anarkali, the famous commercial district of Lahore." (Home, 4) He has learnt from experiences of life that nothing is permanent. His shop is looted and destroyed during partition riots. Manju Kapur after Difficult Daughters, again depicts the trauma and agony of Partition in the novel. It is the effect that Kapur tries to present than the trauma itself. It is a family saga which runs through three generations. Yashpal and Pyarelal are sons of Banwari Lal. Yashpal is married with Sona and Pyarelal with Sushila. As a head of the family, Banwari Lal cannot think of any better employment opportunities for his sons and grand children. Sona and Rupa are sisters. Rupa is married with Prem Nath. Both sisters are childless. Sona is married to a wealthy family while Rupa to an ordinary one. Sona is the eldest daughter-in-law in law of a clothe-shop owner family whereas Rupa is a wife of an ordinary and educated government servant. They live with their in-laws in Karol Bagh area of Delhi. Rupa's marriage is an arranged one, while Sona and Yashpal fall in love and get married. In the beginning, the family members work very hard to uplift their business. All their profits are put forward for the development of the shop. They never take holidays. Lala Banwari
Lal becomes the devotee of a holy man, a Baba, who lives near their house.

The news of Yashpal's love story with Sona breaks out to the family. His mother's feeling is well captured by Kapur in the following words:

*The girl must have done black magic to ensnare him,' wailed the boy's mother. 'Otherwise would he go against his own family after seeing her face for a second? Tell him not to bother leaving the house. I myself will disappear to make way for the wretch he prefers before us all.* (Home, 3)

We find many such instances in our society where a girl is accused of seducing a boy for marriage. To add to that people of Karol Bagh blame Sona's mother for pushing her daughter for marriage. We see here that people almost think that mothers are responsible for what their daughters are doing. At the end, everything settles down. They got married. Even after the gap of two years there is no sign of pregnancy. Pyarelal marries Sushila. She bring lots of dowry while Sona does not. Marriage provides enough reasons for Sushila to her studies. Sushila within a year gives birth to a baby boy. It brings lots of happiness in the Lala Banwari Lal family as he is the first grandchild in family. When Pyarelal is of twenty six years old, he becomes father for another baby. His two sons are named Ajay and Vijay respectively. Sona thinks there must be some deficiency in her
prayers or her bad *karmas* makes her life more miserable. Kapur writes about Sona:

*Beauty, a fair skin, an attentive husband, a well-to-do family. She had tried to make sure her in-laws never regretted her husband’s transgressive love, proving her suitability every day, year after year. She was humble, easy to mould, and ready to please, Sona was gold, like her name. But what use was all this if the Banwari lal blood did not pass on its expected quantity?* (Home, 14)

The family is informed by a letter that Sunita is dead. She burns herself while making cooking in the kitchen. She dies in the hospital. Her six year old son Vicky is put in the lap of Sona as she is childless. But after two months Sona finds herself pregnant after ten years of her marriage. And after seven months a girl arrives in the family through Sona's pregnancy. Sushila taunts as baby girl is born. She is named as Nisha. Nisha's birth assures the rejection of Vicky to a certain extent. As the children grow, Vicky hovers between shop and home uneasily. Now Sona delivers her second child. She feels most blessed while lying on the bad of the hospital after the birth of a baby boy. Her mother-in-law utters on seeing baby boy: "*God has rewarded you,’ cried the mother-in-law, clutching the day-old boy to her withered chest. ’At last the name of his father and grandfather will continue*” (Home, 48)

In this respect, most of women believe that a boy carries forward with him the legacy of the family while a girl does not. In a patriarchal family it is accepted through the propaganda by women only. In a
shocking situation Vicky molests her cousin Nisha at the terrace while playing. Tabish Khair remarks in this respect, "Vicky becomes the bone of contention...making home a site of manipulation, repression and even sexual abuse." (Khair - The Sari-seller's Daughter) Nisha grows silent after this traumatic experience. Kapur says, 'in one or the other way every girl is seduced by any male figure during her life.' Nisha starts sleeping with her grandmother. Her nights are marked by fear and wakefulness. She tells Rupa everything that happened that night on terrace. Nisha is sent to Rupa's home. It is pity that a young girl has to live her home for her safety and mental calm. Mayank Austen Soofi writes, "Home quite fascinatingly, if not very eloquently, shows the choking closeness and destructive limitations of Indian family values." (Soofi - Home Review) Nisha becomes center of attraction in Rupa's home. They are childless so they pour their love whole heartedly on Nisha. Prem Nath is a mechanical draftsman with the Air Headquarters under the Defense Ministry.

Nisha completes her schooling in Rupa's house. Now she returns to Karol Bagh house. She now enters DBC with confidence. Nisha's life takes a new turn when she takes admission to college. In the college campus, she grows up. For the first time she leaves the Karol Bagh home alone. She catches the University special bus for its students in the morning. This bus is full with young students of the university. It is here that she meets Suresh for the first time. He is a tall and thin, with a sallow complexion. They start talking with each other. They start loving each other. They walk together for long times. She meets
Suresh regularly. They go for movie together. Nisha wonders whether her father will be pleased with a man of her choice. When things start to happen, it doesn't take too much time. Vijay is now ready for marriage. He declares that she is ready to marry with a girl of his elder's choice. His father Pyarelal had done the same. Sushila gushes about her daughter-in-law's praise to Nisha:

\[ \text{Nisha, listening, thought of the time, now coming soon, when she would marry. She would talk, laugh, sing, smile.} \]
\[ \text{There would be no need for her to be silent or demure, she was going to the home of her boyfriend (here she blushed for her own benefit). Hers would be a modern relationship.} \]
\[ \text{Gone were the days when women needed to be so silent. And anyway silence in itself was a subversive activity. This she had gathered from her teachers, who had spent much time explaining Fanny Price and the voices in which silence spoke. (Home, 160)} \]

Bansal family is united with the Banwari Lal family thorough the wedding of Vijay and Rekha. Rekha brings with her lots of dowry. With Rekha's entry into the family little conflicts begin to emerge. Kapur writes:

\[ \text{Unfortunately the gods decreed trouble in the marriage of Vijay and Rekha. The single bathroom upstairs turned into a bone of contention so big that the whole house could not contain it. (Home, 167)} \]
After some time, one evening Vicky puts forward his desire to remain united with the family. Nisha's examination comes and goes. As the summer passes, a hard time for secret love comes. They start making phone calls and also meet occasionally. Nisha's parents receive a letter from college authority when she is in her third year. She has short attendance and will not be allowed to sit for examination. Her father presents the fake medical certificate of Nisha's ill heath to the Principal. After this incident, they lock her in their house. Now she can study from home. Her parents make an inquiry about this matter. Nisha doesn’t tell directly about her relationship with Suresh. She sends Suresh to meet his father. Yashpal, her father after inquiring everything, declares that Suresh is not of Nisha's type and he says:

Nisha, dear daughter, leave all thoughts of this dirty low-caste man, what can he give you compared to what we can arrange for you? Marriage into a family that will enable you and your children to live comfortably for the rest of your life. We have rejected many proposals in our search for you, the least of them better than this nobody of a man. (Home, 199)

For Nisha her life is still uncertain. She has desire for learning which she carries on till the end of her life. Earlier she is not allowed to marry the person who doesn’t belong to their community. Now, she wants to carry on her study that too is not allowed by the family out of fear of disgrace. Those are the great days when women resolve to follow the footsteps made by their elders but as the grand old man
Banwari Lal dies the women of the house need not be silent and it is the cry of each crushed heart. After three years of departure from Suresh, Nisha will have to adjust with the idea of another man in his place. Later she badly suffers from eczema and it affects her a lot. Nisha's parents have been worrying about Nisha's unmarried status. It is from Rekha's family that a proposal for Raju arrives. Pyarelal tells Yashpal that this type of proposal does not come daily so without any delay he should make up his mind. Their Babaji gives them permission for the marriage. Yashpal says, "I have good news, continued Babaji. 'The boy and girl's horoscopes are perfectly matched. This girl will be good for the family, and even Nisha's future will open after her sister-in-law comes to the house." (Home, 247)

After marriage, Raju and Pooja go for a honeymoon in Europe. Just after few days of her marriage with Raju, Pooja proves to be quite opposite to what they have imagined. Sona complains about her daughter-in-law's improper behaviour with them. She adds Pooja doesn't spend time with the family. She also neglects Nisha. But she defends herself to Raju. Then Raju protects her. Kapur writes:

Pooja is right: you don't like her, why did you marry me to her, then? Was I in such a hurry? Snapped Raju before returning to his lair, leaving Sona to tearfully narrate the conversation word for bitter word to Nisha and later to Rupa (Home, 258)

Sona tells Rupa that Pooja mostly stays away from home and that too without taking anybody's permission. For Nisha, her family
members believe that she should start going to school to teach. Every protagonist of Manju Kapur is a teacher or lecturer or going to be a teacher. Whether it is Virmati, Astha, Nina or Ishita all are in teaching field. Pooja meantime gives birth to a baby boy. Her parents discover Nisha a mangli and they are constantly searching for matching boy. After leaving her job as a teacher, she starts a small business of boutique. It flourishes like anything. Nisha breaths freely as she is able to find her place in home through this boutique. But soon after a mangli boy for Nisha is found, they meet privately and they choose her. Arvind is widowed but Nisha agrees to marry her but on her own term. They get married. She adjusts a lot after entering into her husband's home. All her dreams of souring her business shatters as she doesn't find time from house hold chores. Her routine is disturbed by her pregnancy. Nisha feels that Arvind breaks hir promise by allowing her to work after marriage. Arvind says, amma, amma all the time. He never takes care of his wife and her dreams. In only ten months, Nisha gives birth to twins. Nisha feels at the end that God has gifted her with two precious gifts. Her duty is now over. The novel ends with the naming ceremony of twins. Everybody looks happy and satisfied. At the end of the novel, Manju Kapur writes:

Forty days later, during the naming ceremony, Nisha sat in front of the havan, and through the smoke gazed at her tiny babies. Their colour was the way hers had been before blemishes had come upon her life. The mother-in-law sitting next to her held the fragile boy in her lap. Just like
his grandfather, she murmured as she caressed his cheek, a statement she made every day, to the approval of all. The more robust girl lay balanced on her mother's knees, eyes shut, cradle cap stuck to her scalp. Nisha clutched her daughter tightly to her breast. Her milk began to spurt and stain her blouse. She quickly adjusted her palla and looked up. Surrounding her were friends, relatives, husband, babies. All mine, she thought, all mine. (Home, 335-336)

The immigrant (2008)

*The Immigrant* is Manju Kapur's fourth novel. At the core, it deals with man-woman relationship but for the first time the locale of the novel is set in a foreign country. The focus now shifts to Canada instead of India. The novel is just not an ordinary story of an immigrant man or woman instead it deals with more serious issues. Anupama Chowdhuri observers:

*Socio-political problems of contemporary life portrayed in terms of individual's quest for identity and freedom along with a sensitive handling of issues like gender, sexuality and diasporas make The Immigrant a novel with a difference.* (Chowdhuri, 41)

The novel carries layers of meaning and implication at the base point is arranged marriage of Ananda and Nina but minutely it transfers into host of other important issues - search for identity, marital
relation, adultery, clash between East and West cultures. It also deals with life of an immigrant in an alien nation with his culture and emotional baggage. R. K. Narayan states:

*The Indian in America is a rather lonely being, having lost his roots in one place and not grown them in another...* Few Indians in America make any attempt to integrate into American culture or social life... Outwardly happy, he is secretly gnawed by some vague discontent and aware of some inner turbulence of vacuum he cannot define. (Narayan, 365)

*The Immigrant* also depicts the life of a couple whose married life is completely devastated by the sexual dysfunction of husband. The Sexual dysfunction and the problems arise due to which occupies major part of the novel. It focuses on the suffering of a married Indian woman in an alien world. It also shows her attempts to save her married life. But on the whole, difficulties faced by an immigrant in an alien nation are nothing as compared to sufferings in married life.

The novel opens with the description of Nina:

*Nina was almost thirty. Friends and colleagues consoled her by remarking on her radiant complexion and jet black hair but such comfort was cold. Nina's skin knew it was thirty, broadcasting the fact that at certain angles in front of the mirror. (The Immigrant, 1)*

Nina, the protagonist of the novel, is almost thirty at the beginning of the novel. Her friends and colleagues console her by
remarking on her radiant complexion. Nina migrated to Delhi with her mother just after finishing her school. She wants to follow English Honours at Miranda House College. It is followed by a post graduate degree from the university. After completing her studies she gets the job of a lecturer in the same college. She teaches English literature. She lives with her widowed mother in a single room unit in Jangpura area. During her M.A. she has fallen in love with Rahul who wants to use her for some time but then he moves on. To her mother Nina, she is still a sweet and a virgin girl. She is desperately waiting to get married.

Ananda is a twenty four years old Indian dentist living in Canada. He settles in Canada after his parent's accidental death. At first he stays with his uncle in Canada. Kapur writes about Ananda:

Eight years earlier, Ananda had been a practicing dentist in small town Dehradun. Unlike many of his friends he had never dreamt of leaving India. His ambitions were simple. He wanted to make enough money to look after his parents and repay them for the time, love and hope they had invested in him. (The Immigrant, 12)

His parents are middle class professionals but with lower scale. Ananda is going to be a doctor. He is from Brahmin family so always surrounded by the rituals. His maternal uncle already has settled in Halifax for the last twenty years. He is urging them to come to Canada permanently. His parent don't want to lose their only son. It is only
Ananda's brother-in-law who advocates his going to Canada. Brother-in-law opines:

*Opportunities are very insistent. If you neglect them they promise to retaliate by filling you with regret for the rest of your life. A lost opportunity refuses to hide; it pops out at every low moment, dragging you even lower.* (The Immigrant, 17)

And finally, Ananda leaves for Canada by beating all odds at home. He a lands in Halifax on India's Independence Day. He has to struggle a lot to settle in Canada. His uncle gives him every lesson for being a good dentist. As he is a pure vegetarian he has to struggle a lot. He decides to be a citizen as soon as he qualifies for it. Ananda mournfully thinks of his sexual difficulties and wonders whether a breakthrough moment would come with an arranged marriage or not. He is also waiting for loving and caring life partner. His sister Alka finds a bride for her brother. She insists, "*A wife will help you settle. Ma's spirit will not rest in peace till you are married...You have to stop being so fussy. My astrologer told me about this girl, a teacher in my old college, a year younger that you....'You are thirty one, you that hurrying?...'Marriage is a question of adjustment', 'You still need a canvas to paint on.'" (The Immigrant, 46-47)

Ananda accepts her sister's advice. They meet and start sharing their feelings, likings, habits, responsibilities and so on. Again when Ananda returns for marriage, they meet. Nina wants to have a family and children. She also wants to make her mother happy. The wedding is
fixed. The court marriage is opted by them as it is less expensive. And finally the marriage is held in the Arya Samaj Mandir in Mount Kailash Colony. And the registry of it takes place at Alka's home. The description of the bridal night is done by Manju Kapur in the following manner:

*The bridal night. Now that the moment was close, Nina felt shy. Ananda closed the door and grabbed her. His hands leapt all over, under her blouse, her petticoats; they forced her on the bed to enable an even speedier exploration of her body. Startled, she tried to slow him down, but in five minutes he had come, five minutes and he had not even entered her. The rest was done with his hands, but that was stuff she could have done on her own.* (The Immigrant, 89)

And then the inner conflict of Nina begins with consummation. She compares Ananda with Rahul. Rahul was much obsessive and endlessly asking her about how she felt in different positions. Ananda starts a new life with Nina after their marriage. As the immigrant housewife Nina has a difficult time. Manju Kapur comments, "*Certain Indians Become immigrants slowly*...These immigrants are always in two minds. Outwardly they adjust well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading assumptions about a heart that is divided." (The Immigrant, 120) At present Nina is a wife who is alone for hours. She starts to realize that she is an
immigrant for life. As the days pass, we can see the dispute between Nina and Ananda growing. Manju Kapur captures their dispute:

_Here I am thought of as a cultured man, as Canadian as everyday else. So I don't want folks to get the wrong impression.' 'What impression?' 'That you are a traditional, backward Indian girl, like some of these women you see at the India Club. Can't even speak English properly.' 'How can you live here and not speak English properly?' 'Some immigrant type straight from the village-speaks English sure, but would rather not.' 'They couldn't possibly have thought I am like that.' I know, I know. I'm just warning you. Especially, you know, since we married the way we did._ (The Immigrant, 147-148)

Nina and Ananda meet at night. Ananda thinks he is doing better than before even without the anesthetic spray for his penis to delay his climax. Once home, Ananda glorifies his wife by listening, they make love immediately. Their dramas fragment at the dining table on the thought of a child. They are not communicating properly in their sex life. According to Kapur, sex is a form of communication, and if they cannot communicate on this basic level, what about everything else?

_For years and years Nina had masturbated, hoping the day would come when a loving partner would circumvent the furtive, dissatisfied feeling this left her with. Thrice a day on average, and this restraint only due to the fact that she_
was working. Guilt ridden, she would promise herself, this is the last time, but her restlessness made this impossible.

(The Immigrant, 179)

After much dilemma, Ananda goes for sexual therapy. He returns with more confidence and hope to have a good sexual relation with Nina. But he cannot satisfy her fully which makes her all the more disappointed. Nina also visits the Gynecologist for her satisfaction. She is completely normal. It is Ananda who is at fault. Even after knowing all these, she reads many books related to sex life. She learns about various stages of sex life. She also believes in the therapy of Semone de Beauvoir after reading The Second Sex that one is not born, but rather, becomes woman.

Meantime, Nina gets a job in a library. Now she becomes busy officially. Ananda can now do unsuccessful sexual experiment first with Sue and later with Mandy. After few months Nina gets a letter, hoping to get for a recognized degree by the Association of Commonwealth Universities. After getting the degree she can do a job anywhere in North America. For next two years, her life as a student begins. Among her Library School students Anton finds her attractive. He likes Asian women as he finds them warm, intelligent, gentle and empathetic. Library School creates an unprecedented excitement in Nina. In December she goes to Ottawa on National Library's tour. On the other hand, Ananda spends each night with Mandy. He feels free with Mandy while he feels the burden of responsibilities with Nina. Ananda's friend Gary warns him of the heavy consequences of such
illegitimate relation. On his advice he turns to Nina fully. On the last
day of the tour, Anton finds himself patient and he has made a good
relation with Nina. For the first time Nina has a sense of her own self.
She looks entirely separate from other couple, autonomous and
independent. She involves herself in sex with Anton. It is so weird that
it does not make her feel guilty about it. Rahul, her first lover, takes
away her virginity and hopes. Ananda, her second lover, is her
husband. And her third lover Anton has made her international. Anton
has to leave for three months as the summer holiday arrives. She finds
herself in an uneasy mood while he is away. But she decides not to
repeat it again and comes back to India. But one day Anton arranges
for dinner for Nina. Everything is going smoothly but suddenly Anton
forces himself on her:

*Her legs were wide apart now, his pants off, he was
pushing himself into her. Her tightness and reluctance
increased her pain, but could not keep him out. His arms
were heavy weights against hers, her breath was caught
inside her chest, she was panting and gasping. What was
once so pleasurable was now agonizing.* (The Immigrant.
308)

Nina is used as a toy by her lovers. They abuse her and finally
degrade her integrity. In her earlier days, Rahul exploits her and
squeezes her body like a lemon and enjoys the moment. Ananda uses
her as a nipple to pass his time while doing sexual experiments with
white females. After getting a job of a librarian, Anton, molestes teases,
makes love and finally rapes her. The present condition of Nina is confusing. She is not able to share her feeling with anyone and suffers mentally. Manju Kapur aptly writes about her present state of mind:

> Hours passed. Her helpless feeling spread to every pore, reducing her to a baby. If she exposed him, that would mean exposing herself as well. He would use their liaison to defend himself. The whole affair would be out, and her integrity questioned. She shrank from any gaze, so inevitable once she opened her mouth. (The Immigrant 309)

At home she is not able to understand Ananda's pretence that everything is fine. Each time she considers confronting him with his infidelity, she feels the uselessness of it. To get any real response in their married life, first she will have to confess her own betrayal. They will have to examine about their betrayal to each other. She decides to go back to India. She also remembers all who have been nice to her. She remembers Zenobia, she is the first person to be sympathetic to her. She understands Nina properly. At the end Nina's life in Canada is the one of a deprived immigrant. Manju Kapur thinks at the end of the novel:

> Perhaps that was the ultimate immigrant experience. Not that any one thing was steady enough to attach yourself to for the rest of your life, but that you found different ways to belong, ways not necessarily lasting, but ones that made your journey less lonely for a while. When something
failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back. The continent was full of people escaping unhappy pasts. She too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, a floating resident of the western world. When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again. (The Immigrant, 330)

Custody (2011)

Custody is Manju Kapur's latest novel. It depicts the fallout of the institution of marriage and its effect on life of its characters especially children. In it Manju Kapur shows the dark side of the divorce. Mithu Benerji remarks, "Custody is a novel that is true to the universal angst of modern marriage, with its burden of individualism." (Custody Review- Banerji) Manju Kapur is not interested in showing the things and incidents; instead she presents the effects of the events. The theme of disintegration of the happy family, divorce and ugly battle of custody are depicted in imaginative story. Shubha Singh writes:

Failed marriages and their consequences are the theme of Kapur's latest book. As the title, Custody, suggests the story is about the bitter battle between divorced parents
for the custody of their two children. It is another absorbing story in Kapur's series of popular novels on modern urban Indian middle class life and its travails.

(Review - Overseas Indian)

The feeling of unhappiness and conflict runs through the novel. Marriage and joint family are portrayed intimately in the novel. The bitter realities of divorce are presented through the eyes of the children. Shalini Umachandran thinks *Custody* is "a book about marriage and divorce with children at the heart of it." (Review - Custody)

In *Custody*, Kapur portrays the family instead of an individual's life. Manju Kapur's novels are filled with the theme of marriage in one or the other way. It also depicts the challenges faced by an urban middle class family. In India marriage is not only a union of a couple but also of two families. Manju Kapur gives serious attention to the children whose parents are divorced and how it affects children's life as a whole. Kapur in the Random Reads interview tells that:

*rather than focus on the divorce, infidelity etc., I look at the consequences of these actions, which I find more interesting. Not what propels a divorce, but what the long term consequences of this are for everybody concerned.*

(Interview - Random Reads)

Children suffer most when their parents get divorce without any kind of fault from their side. This novel also projects globalization and economic liberation. The plot is set in around the upper middle
class family living in Delhi. In it family stands high on values and morals in spite of being affected adversely. The novel opens in following manner:

January 1st, 1998, The couple lay among stained sheets and rumpled quilts, eyes closed, legs twisted together like the knotted branches of a low growing tree....Eventually they dragged each other off the bed and into the bathroom. They hated this, they said as they washed and dressed, simply hated it. But they had kept their promise, they had heralded the New Year by making love. (Custody, 1)

The novel opens on New Year night when Ashok and Shagun are enjoying in the inner lanes of South Delhi. It is not a love making scene between a husband and her wife but between a wife and her husband's boss. The situation is quite ironical. Raman Kaushik, Shagun's husband is the sales manager in cold drink company of Ashok Khanna. Raman is doing his best to meet the target set by company. One day he complains, *"My wife complains she hardly sees me anymore. We have a small baby, its hard on her."* (Custody, 8) But Ashok, the marketing genius, pursues him to work harder than ever. On his way back to home, *"Raman thought of his wife and the distance he had begun to feel between them."* (Custody, 9) It is at the Oberoi that Shagun first meets Ashok. After meeting him, Shagun ask many questions, *"Had he managed to produce results so far? Where was his wife? How come he wasn't married?"*(Custody, 11)
Raman and Shagun have two children Arjun, eight years old and Roohi, a year old daughter. Their marriage is arranged on standard lines. Shagun is the beauty and Raman with brilliant prospect. The first child has born within a year. Raman blames himself for her early pregnancy. He could have been more careful. But on the other side their family members are eagerly waiting to welcome the first baby,

*Shagun herself had no doubts. Everything was a glorious adventure, and being pregnant plunged her into the center of all attention. She didn’t throw up once, her skin glowed, her hair shone, her husband called her a Madonna, her mother said she was fruitful like earth, her in-laws looked proud and fed her almonds and ghee whenever they could get near her. (Custody, 15)*

Raman's work is being appreciated in his company. These are the good years for them. When Arjun is about eight years old, Shagun gets pregnant again. She is disturbed on learning this news. This is not how she wants to fill vacant space in her life. Arjun looks like Shagun and Roohi is a carbon copy of Raman. Their life is going in one straight line. Raman has very good relations with Mrs. Sabharwal, Shagun's mother. He is behaving with Mrs. Sabharwal as if he is her son.

Maneesha Govender comments on Manju Kapur's projection of Raman. She remarks, "*What stands out particularly in this novel is his anguish and anger at the betrayal he experiences at the hands of his worldly wife. Kapur presents him to us with empathy and meticulous attention to detail.*" (Conversation with Manju Kapur) Shagun doesn’t like this
tuning between Raman and her mother but Mrs. Sabharwal feels secure, the more she gets to know Raman. During their eleven years of married life no one has crossed the boundary of matrimony. It is Ashok Khanna who is trying to seduce her. Mrs. Sabharwal realizes that something wrong is happening. It is stared with Raman's business trip. But what can a mother do in such a situation? She remains silent. She is not interested in teaching her daughter the lessons of virtue and value.

The focus now shifts to Mrs. Rajora's family. She is a librarian in Delhi University. The Rajora family has one child, a daughter, Ishita. Ishita's childhood is passed through illness so marriage is far from her thought. She has finished her B.A. and she does B.Ed., which will be useful in future. She marries Suryakanta. "Both husband and wife found marriage liberating. For Suryakanta a female companion was a novel thing. For five years he had studied hard at the Delhi College of Engineering, now it was time to enjoy himself." (Custody, 53) The Suryakanta's family is traditional minded especially her mother. "Eighteen months into the marriage the boy's family began to make noises. They are beginning to ask. Why haven't you conceived?" (Custody, 56) Ishita's mother-in-law takes her to the gynecologist after few days. In the test it is revealed that Ishita has T.B. in her infancy. As the reports are revealed, Ishita sees her mother-in-laws' face red with anger and she said:

\[\text{For us money is not as important as family. But beta, it is essential that Suryakanta have a child. As the only son, he has to make sure that the bloodline of his forefathers}\]
continues. And now I need to talk to your mother. 

(Custody, 69)

At the end they decide to take divorce from Ishita. Rs. ten lacs are demanded from them by The Rajoras for the welfare of Ishita. At this time Ishita is twenty six years old. Her heart breaks completely on the thought of being expelled from her in-laws home for her infertility. Here Raman hires The Lovely Detective Agency to spy on Shagun. He doubts his beloved wife whom he loves most. But on learning about Shagun's relationship with Ashok, he suffers a heart attack. Shagun decides to divorce Raman and responds to Ashok's relation. Although she is guilty, she takes this brave step to opt out of relation with Raman. In Custody Manju Kapur has portrayed two types of women. First, Ishita, who believes in familial unity and second, Shagun, who opts out of her married life to follow her desire and pleasure with Ashok. Ishita is devastated due to infertility and Shagun decides to divorce although she has a loving husband and two children. Then Ashok leaves for US and Shagun is living with her mother. Then at one night Shagun leaves the home:

On the day of Ashok's arrival, Shagun left the house with an overnight case. She had to meet him one more time, she had to say goodbye in a way that wouldn't hurt him, then go to her life with Raman, that joyless, dismal, uninteresting life. Everything was magic the moment she stepped into the airport, the intensity of the last minutes of waiting, the ecstasy of reunion. This was where she
belonged, this was where she was most herself. (Custody, 111)

As Shagun leaves her home without letting anyone know, Raman prevaricates with children about her. But as the time passes, Raman says to his children that, Mama loves them, but she has left her own accord. Shagun after sometimes asks for divorce by mutual consent. She in addition wants some arrangement by which she can visit Roohi and Arjun regularly.

What right did you have to do this to me? He said, one of many prepared lines bursting forth. While the words had sounded strong during rehearsals, the moment they left his mouth, he felt like a pitiable beggar, bewildered by circumstances. (Custody, 114)

But Raman denies divorce to her and feels exhilarated about it. As Shagun takes the children with her, Raman visits Nandan, his cousin, who is an advocate and forces him to think of his life in terms of accusation and evidence as his cousin drafts his petition. Ishita is living in the same colony with her parents. Raman comes in contact with Ishita. Raman succeeds in bringing back her daughter Roohi. Meantime Ishita involves herself in social works. It becomes very difficult for Mrs. Sabharwal to save her face in society as Shagun opts for divorce. Both husband and wife are not only fighting about divorce but also about the custody of their loved ones. Nisha Susan comments. "the trouble with Custody is that its central theme - our love for our children is fierce, irrational and beats any variety of conjugal love - is
under-explored." (Tehelka-Susan) At this time Shagun feels some kind of fear in her mind. This new set up will bring nothing for their children, Shagun feels. As the day passes, Raman is fully concentrating for the August 10, when court to reply on the interim application filed by them and process of seeing his children would start. Kapur asserts:

It was around this time that Arjun started fussing over school. The first-term exams were scheduled for the end of August and he had never felt so unprepared. He had just scraped through in science, 10 on 25, and once again had to forge his mother's signature. (Custody, 166)

Here Kapur shows the effect of divorce and court proceedings that take its toll on the children's life. Kapur details the unpleasant and tedious workings of the fight for custody, and the ways in which parents make pawns out of their children as they battle. Shagun at the breakfast table asks Arjun about his health and...

Do you miss your father? This question was dragged from her. Arjun was an intelligent child, their situation should have been clear by now. Ashok offered to talk to him, but she had nervously refused, even though he had assured her that all he wanted was for Arjun to know he had a place in his life. But she hadn't considered her son ready for such information. 'Are we going back?' 'No, I can't go back.' 'The boy played with his food. 'Why?' 'Don't be silly, Arjun, you know why.' (Custody, 167)
Shagun's re-marriage has an adverse effect on Arjun's mind. He refused to get up: if his mother dragged him off the bed, he refuses to brush his teeth, or have a bath, or put on his clothes, or eat his breakfast. Each step is a battle for Shagun. Due to this sadness Shagun decides to send Arjun in the boarding school. On the other hand Raman is opposite to Shagun. He wants his children happy whenever they are. Once Arjun made a phone call to his father at that time Raman says:

'I want you to be happy, whenever you are.' 'It's all right.'
'Tell your mother, if you stay with me, you will see her every weekend. And I if there is some trouble in school, I will sort it out with the teachers, but you have to let me know.' (Custody, 202)

In weekend, Raman goes to pick his children from grandmother's flat. According to court, Arjun's future lays in DPA. Raman knows that it due to brain washing of his child by Shagun and Ashok otherwise he would not opt for DPA. Now Arjun moves to DPA after clearing entrance exams. Arjun settles well in the school. Shagun uses her children as tool for getting divorce. They are fighting only for the custody of the children. Manju Kapur interprets the situation in the following words:

Divorce by mutual consent was initiated. The couple appeared in court, swore that it was impossible for them to live together and that they were not acting under duress. Six months later, they would reiterate the same thing, upon which divorce would be granted. Shagun was to give up all
ownership of their joint assets, all claims to maintenance, the legal guardianship of the children, only demanding visitation rights in the holidays. (Custody, 245)

Mrs. Kaushik reveals the truth about Raman's troubled married life to Mrs. Rajora. And she is trying to take interest in Raman for her infertile daughter Ishita. Ishita is also interested in Roohi as she wants to adopt the child. Roohi plays with Ishita and both of them like each other's company. As the time progresses, Raman and Ishita come nearer. They decide to marry. Ishita starts her life with Raman and Roohi. Ishita is turning suddenly into the mould of a wife, mother and mistress of a large house with servants. Roohi comes nearer to Ishita but not Arjun. Ishita now focuses on Roohi's life in OSC. Arjun is coming close with his mother but with his father, he keeps a bit distance. Arjun writes to Raman:

*The school buses will come to Nehru Stadium on June 1st.*
*Next day Roo and I will go to Naani's place. Mama will be waiting for us there. I won a point for my house because I did so well in my exams. Rest is fine.* (Custody, 363)

As Arjun doesn't wants to stay with Raman for one year, he decides to go to US. Kaushik family remembers her ex-daughter-in-law with great anger and descent. During her illness, Ishita provides her with lots of love and warmth. After some time Ishita wakes up the subject of custody to Raman. But he also understands that it is impossible to resolve the custody issue that easily. He snortes,
Because we don’t send Roohi, she doesn’t let Arjun visit me. But Roohi thinks of Ishita as her mother, Ishita herself is very reluctant to have the child’s heart divided, and she takes such good care of her, what am I to say? She is not your child? You have to send her away to someone she does not even remember clearly? I can’t do that. (Custody, 393)

Another year passes, the date of the judgment comes. It is getting towards four o’clock when the judge calls them to her chamber. Shagun argues with for the custody of both the children with a lie that:

I now want custody of both my children, particularly of my little girl, who is growing up without any maternal influence. This man is no longer trustworthy. May be because he has married again, and there is a stepmother in the picture. We all know what stepmothers are like. (Custody, 411)

The judge announces the verdict. She gives Roohi to Raman and Arjun to Shagun. And if the children want, they will visit but not otherwise. Ishita makes up for Arjun by pouring her limitless love and warm for Roohi. Ishita tenderly kisses the hand of Roohi. Manju Kapur ends the novel by stating:

The worst was over, over, thank God. Confidence flooded her. She had won this first, most difficult round. Roohi was almost eight, in ten years custody would be legally immaterial. She didn’t think that woman would go on
appeal, but if she did, she was armed with all the arts of delay. Another four years and she would be absolutely safe. In the mean time victory lay with the possessor.

(Custody, 415)

In this way, in Custody, as Arifa Akbar calls it as gendered battle is presented by Kapur in a very subtle manner. She asserts:

Kapur addresses the gendered nature of custody battles in India - men often refuse to grant divorce while women usually have greater claim to the children - but she refuses to generalize or moralize. (Custody Review - Akbar)

Thus, in Custody, the custody of children matters most. Hence there is a battle for it.
Work Cited


Singh, Shubha. 'Custody battles come alive in this absorbing novel'. OverseasIndian. 4 March 2012


