Chapter - 4
THE STUDY OF IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR
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The images of women in are reflected in various literary forms of
the literature. Their activities confined to private space and they are
very rarely shown as playing main role in social and historical
development. The nature of womanhood is constantly defined in the
terms of male desire and male imagination. Kate Millet points out in
Sexual Politics:

Under patriarchy the female did not herself develop the
symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive
and civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which
shaped culture in regard world to the female were also of
male design. (Millete, 26)

Women's population occupies more than half of the population of
the world but still she is not treated at par with man despite
innumerable evolutions and revolutions. In India, society has always
tried to keep women within the periphery of the domestic life and
avoid their interest in the worldly activities. She was marginalized to
the role of looking after home and hearth. As a result of that she
couldn't widen her horizon beyond her family life. A woman is always
found to be caught in her emotional life and the intricate fabric of
human relationship. Thus, the life of a woman widely portrays her
innermost experiences.
In order to get the insights into the culture of any country, we can study the literature of both male and female writers. The Post-modern era in India is marked by increasing number of women writers who disapprove the hegemonic thinking that considers literary creation as a male domain. Women's literature of this era epitomizes a literary voice of a group of people who were oppressed, ignored and rejected for centuries due to an overbearing nature of patriarchal social system. The women writers during this period started voicing their own opinion through their literature.

Manju Kapur is a contemporary Indian novelist in English who established herself with her first novel *Difficult Daughters*. From Virmati to Shagun and Ishita all are middle class educated urban Indian women struggling to establish themselves with their own independent identities in the patriarchal setup of which they are part and parcel. For centuries, it was seen that the institution of marriage has proved beneficial for the male members of the society and led to gradual cessation of women's identity. But with the entry of certain women writers such as Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Namita Gokhle, Bharati Mukherjee, Manju Kapur and others - changed the scenario completely.

The images of women that we find in Manju Kapur's novels are of unique kinds. Her women behave in their own style allotted to them by Kapur. Her all women protagonist are married one. All her women take education at the highest pedestal. All her protagonists are urban
middle class. Manju Kapur has never portrayed an illiterate character in her novel. No character of her wonders in the farm or rural area as she has never portrayed any character that has rural background. Sudarshan Sharma writes,

*Manju Kapur is one of the women writers from India whose protagonists are women trying to maintain a balance all the time. Their suffering has made them strong and they are struggling to set themselves free from the shackles of tradition and various prejudices* (Sharma, 45).

**Women in Difficult Daughters**

The novel depicts two types of women. First are traditional types of women who firmly stick to the age old values and traditions. In this novel Kasturi and Ganga represent this class. The other type is that of women who are modern in their perspective. Shakuntala and Swarna Lata are representative of this group.

**Virmati:**

Virmati is the protagonist of the novel. She is born into a strict and high minded household in Amritsar. She is the eldest child in the Lala Diwan Chand Family. She becomes the second mother of her ten other siblings. She devotes herself fully in taking care of her younger siblings. She is a liberal minded girl who works very hard. But she is very impatient. The love and care which she expected from her family and especially her mother, is never allotted to her. Form her childhood
she was bounded by the duties of the home she never finds time for her own. She says:

I'm tired of knitting and sewing,' flared Virmati. 'Besides, I'm here to look after you,' 'I can look after myself.' 'Why did you bring me if you don't need me, Mati? (Difficult Daughters, 12)

She is not allowed to follow her study properly. Her mother taught her that there are many things to do in life than education. During her teenage, she was frequently scolded by her mother, "At your age I was already expecting you, not fighting with my mother." (Difficult Daughters, 18) Since her childhood Virmati has always been working for others. Virmati's ideal is her cousin Shakuntala. She is doing M.Sc. in Chemistry. The first seed of getting education and freedom comes to Virmati's mind after meeting her at her home. During their walk Shakuntala shares activities she does - experiments in laboratory, participation in seminar, read each other's work etc. Virmati clunges her when she leaves for Lahore and says:

Maybe I will also one day come to Lahore, Pehnji,' she wept. 'I wish I too could do things. But I am not clever.' (Difficult Daughters, 18)

Here Manju Kapur depicts a' new woman' in Virmati, who wants to assert her right to study and get married. According to Manju Kapur freedom for women is most important. Virmati is the embodiment of freedom. After her failure in FA her mother presses her to get married but she wants to have her own space, her own identity, and wants to
taste the sweetness of the freedom like her cousin Shakuntala. Virmati wants to give practice to her English, while Kasturi feels it insignificant. Virmati doesn't get success in convincing her mother and get herself engaged with a canal engineer Inderjeet. She has to struggle a lot to continue her education after her engagement. She joins AS College. Here she meets an oxford return Professor, Harish Chandar. He is a lecturer in English. She likes her personality. At college, he looks at Virmati with warmth in his eyes. Kapur writes:

Virmati always sat in the front row with the four other girls who were in the professor's class, and that was the only place he saw her in college, flower-like, against a backdrop of male students. (Difficult Daughters, 46)

Harish is a married man and lives in Virmati's house as tenant. For Virmati, professor's love was more stimulant than Inderjeet. She is getting tangled in the web of professor's love. She compares Inderjeet with Harish. So she rejects Inderjeet and suggests her mother to let Indumati marry him. She is locked in the godown when her grandfather comes to know about her affair with the professor. Virmati feels suffocated when she learns about Ganga's pregnancy. She writes to the professor:

"Now I know there is still some life in your feelings for your wife - as it is proper there should be - it would be very wrong of me to come between you, especially when there is going to be another baby. But for the pregnancy, I would never have known. What has happened has happened
for the good. In which world I was living, to be so caught up in the illusion of your love? Just as you must do your duty to your family, and your wife, so too I must do my duty to mine. (Difficult Daughters, 107)

She decides to start her studies once again. She writes to Harish that she is going to Lahore to do her BT. She wants to be a teacher like him and Shakuntala. Thus the journey of 'a new woman' starts, who does not want to be a rubber doll for others. She decides to close her chapter with Harish and burn his letters. She starts a meaningful life in Lahore with her roommate Swarna Lata. She is active in politics. Virmati wants herself to be involved with Swarna but professor's thoughts keep circling around her mind. Harish comes to meet her and also to pursue her. He succeeds in convincing his love for Virmati. For the first time they enjoy physical pleasure. She becomes pregnant and has to abort her child by selling the gold bangles given to her by her grandfather. After this incident she again decides to cut her relation with him.

She goes to Siramaur, a hill station in Nahan to become a principal of Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya. She teaches English Literature and household to class IX and X. Virmati enjoys her stay in Nahan. It is probably her best period. She enjoys a free life here like a bee and tastes honey of her life. Her quest for identity ends here. She has to manage everything entirely by herself. Here she has no family and close friends. She attains the status of female autonomy. Virmati finds in Nahan a 'room of one's own'. However, Veena Singh asserts that, "in
Virmati there struck the head and the heart, physical and moral, Virmati gives way to her heart and body." (Singh, 168) But fate has written something else for her as Harish comes here to meet her. She meets him secretly at night. The trustee of the school finds her guilty and she has to leave her job as she has lost employees' confidence. She decides to go to Shantiniketan but on her way she meets a friend of Harish. He calls Harish at her home. They get married and she becomes the second wife of Harish. Maria Elena Martos Hueso points out

Virmati's quest for freedom from the patriarchal moulds of tradition casts upon her eventually proves an erratic one, for she gets caught in the net of allocated female role that she was trying to evade. (Elena, 160)

Virmati feels trapped in the professor's house as a second wife. She is not able to project herself in the home. She is not allowed to wash his cloths. She has no permission to enter the kitchen. Everything is done by professor's first wife Ganga. Virmati is assertive but in her in-laws home she never blossoms to the full. As she is alienated from her mother and family members, she feels trapped in with Ganga as a co-wife in the home. She thinks that she must have done some sin in her past. She gains the marital status but peace of mind, the thing she needed most, doesn't able to achieve. Elleke Boehmer rightly remarks:

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
Virmati's life is a constant struggle from one front to another. She lives her life with dullness and loneliness which makes her feel sad about herself. Ganga's children don't like her. Her mother-in-law also ignores her. When she becomes pregnant her mother-in-law takes care of her. She somehow feels nice. She loses her child due to miscarriage. It was not her fault but destiny has written something else for her. She starts her studies again. Meantime riots occur and she is not able to see her mother and family members. On the death of her grandfather she is not able to attend his funeral due to her past. She becomes pregnant again and gives birth to a girl child. Virmati wants her to name 'Bharati' but as Harish rejects it, Ida name is given to her. As tables' turn, Virmati finds Ida as a difficult daughter. We can quote Anita Myles to sum up Virmati's journey, called life:

*Virmati's inner strength and will power sustain her providing that there is more to life than depending on marriage, parents and other conventional value systems. At least Virmati conjures up the courage to defy traditions for the sake of her own happiness.* (Myles, 128)

**Kasturi:**

Kasturi is a traditional woman who obeys orders of others throughout her life. In patriarchal family such as Lala Diwan Chand, she suffers everything silently. She does most of things by disobeying
her own self. She works day and night in the house. She becomes tired every night due to overload of household works. Manju Kapur says:

*Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache.* (Difficult Daughters, 7)

Kasturi is a mother of eleven children. She has to shift her burden of child rearing to her eldest child Virmati. She belongs to Arya Samaj family in which child marriage is considered as an evil. During her childhood Kasturi used to go to the Mission school, but the day when she was found praying in front of the picture of Christ proved to her last day in that school. After some time a college for Hindu girls was built and Kasturi,

...became the first girl in her family to postpone the arrival of the wedding guests by tentative assault on learning. (Difficult Daughters, 62)

She learnt reading, writing, household works and sewing while she was in Hindu girl's school. Manju Kapur writes:

*During Kasturi's formal schooling it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education continued at home. Her mother tried to ensue her future happiness by impeccable nature of her daughter's qualifications. She was going to please her in-laws.* (Difficult Daughters, 62)
She also learnt rituals of Arya Samaj in school. She follows the rituals daily. Kasturi is living in a patriarchal environment where a woman's ultimate destiny is to get married and she has to work tirelessly to make her in-laws happy. Usha Kurjekar remarks:

*Kasturi, the mother, sees a rival in her daughter, who would challenge her world in future. The mother remains confined to the bed as she is only involved in the work of procreation. Her unique position in the house to be lost to Virmati and she has to yield unwillingly. As soon as Virmati shows signs of assertion, conflict develops between the mother and daughter, Virmati's falling in love with the Professor makes the matter worse.* (Kurjekar, 231)

When Virmati doesn't obey her and goes against her wishes, she says, "God has put you on earth to punish me." (*Difficult Daughters*, 111) She calls Virmati 'randi' when she married Harish. Kasturi believes that Virmati has put a black spot on her family's name by marrying an already married man. She breaks all relations with Virmati. Kasturi is the embodiment of customs and old values.

**Shakuntala:**

Shakunatala is Virmati's cousin and Lajwanti's daughter. She lives in Lahore. She is doing M.Sc in Chemistry. She is a free will girl with liberal mind. No one dares to talk about her unmarried status. She is described as a force. In front of Kasturi and Virmati, Lajwanti boasts about her daughter's qualities.
How can anyone see her when she has no time? Such a talented teacher, so popular, what an inspiring example she is for young ones,' 'She lives for others, not herself, but what to do, everybody in our family is like that. And with all this reading-writing, girls are getting married late. It is the will of God. (Difficult Daughters, 15)

But personally she too is worried about the unmarried status of her daughter and also her modern outlook towards everything. The very word 'shadi' makes her miserable and desperate. Kasturi worries about Shakuntala as she is able to see her occasionally only.

Lajwanti disapprovingly sniffed in the background. 'When will this girl settle down?' she asked rhetorically. 'All the time in the lab, doing experiments, helping the girls, studying or going to conferences. I tell her she should be a man. (Difficult Daughters, 16)

But Shakuntala is a role model for Virmati. It is Shakuntala who first inspires Virmati to study further. She is a glamorous cousin of Virmati. Her vibrancy and intelligence inspires Virmati towards her. She tells Virmati while walking that these people don't understand them. She also tells Virmati about living her life with her own terms. She informs Virmati about her friends who are unhappy with their families and seeking satisfaction by working with her group. She continues:

We travel, entertain ourselves in the evenings, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars. One of them is
even going abroad for higher studies. (*Difficult Daughters*, 17)

She believes that if a woman wants to follow higher studies she should not be married. According to her marriage takes away the freedom from women. For her independence of one's self is much more important than anything else. She knows that Kasturi considers her as a bad influence for Virmati. But Virmati denies that and clung to her when Shakuntala leaves for Lahore. Virmati tells Shakuntala that she also wants to be like her but she is not that clever. But Shakuntala consoles Virmati and tells her that,

*times are changing, and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?* (*Difficult Daughters*, 18)

In this way Manju Kapur portrays the character of a modern woman who is disregarded in her family for her bold behaviour. Shakuntala thinks beyond being a house wife. Her lifestyle is very glamorous. Virmati notices the change that Lahore had brought in her way of life. She is beautiful and intelligent.

**Swarna Lata:**

Swarna Lata is a roommate of Virmati in Lahore. The meaning of her name is golden creeper. She is active in politics. She is a modern woman with her own views and opinions. She thinks independently. She wants to do something more than just marrying. She doesn't want to wait for her man and involves herself in others. She has a big heart. She has a lot to offer to Virmati when she meets her at the first time.
Swarna Lata is also a rebel like Virmati. She leaves her home for her own good. She wants something more from life. She tells Virmati about leaving her home:

*I was very clear that I wanted to do something besides getting married. I told my parents that if they would support me for two more years I would be grateful. Otherwise I would be forced to offer satyagraha along with other Congress workers against the British. And go on offering it until taken to prison. Free food and lodging at the hands of the imperialists,* (Difficult Daughters, 118)

When Shakuntala comes to meet Virmati in Lahore hostel, she also meets Swarna Lata. Shakuntala finds Swarna plain. She derecognizes her personality. But Virmati tells Shakuntala about Swarna Lata's look:

*Anybody would be impressed by Swarna's eyes behind her glasses, eyes, eyes that refused to smile just because they were looked at. And what about the intelligence in her round face, and the friendliness that was frank and open?* (Difficult Daughters, 119)

She is not just a room partner for Virmati. At a time when Virmati finds herself in trouble it is Swarna who advices her and also helps her. One time when Virmati is completely in dilemma about her relation with Harish, she advices her:
Most families look upon the marriage of a daughter as a sacred duty - or sacred burden. We are lucky we're living in times when women can do something else. Even in Europe women gain more respect during wartime. And here we have that war, and our satyagraha as well. (Difficult Daughters, 152)

When Virmati returns from Nahan, she finds herself pregnant. Swarna Lata helps her in aborting the child. She is for Virmati 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.' Swarna Lata is the only female who gets out of life what she wants. Shakuntala and Swarna Lata are liberal women who stand tall in a patriarchal society. Both are models for Virmati. Virmati wants to follow the footsteps of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata. Christopher Rollason remarks:

At all events, it may be said that Virmati’s frustrated life is, as it were, framed- as if in a triptych- by those two other, much more successful lives: those of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, both emblematic of the educated, politicized and emancipated women. In other words, the psychological annihilation of Virmati, at the hands of her own family and her husband”s, should not be read as a fatality. What happens to Virmati is no doubt the most representative destiny of the Indian woman, quantitatively or statistically, but Kapur”s novel shows that other paths also exist, while further stressing that choice are by no means simple or either-or. (Rollason 7)
Ganga:

*The wife fair, face like the moon, short, round, plump, with her sari covering her head, and falling below the waist.*

(*Difficult Daughters*, 35)

Manju Kapur introduces Ganga with above given description. Ganga is a typical traditional woman. She is an uneducated woman married to a professor. As she is illiterate, Harish tries to teach her. In this respect Manju Kapur writes:

*The woman thought back to the many times her husband had tried to teach her. In the beginning he was patient, it was an impossible situation that his wife should be illiterate. He had decided to start with Hindi: when she had mastered that, she could graduate to English, read the books he liked, become his companion. But the woman found it difficult to learn.* (*Difficult Daughters*, 40)

She does every kind of work in her home. At home she does everything from washing clothes to polishing shoes, tidying of the desk, dusting of the books, filling fountain pen, mending clothes, stitching of shits she did it all. When Harish's poet friends come, she makes *samosas, kachoris, pakoras* and *mathris* for them. Virmati’s marriage with Harish comes to her as a great shock. She is disillusioned by his act. She thinks about her fault but couldn't find out. Ganga is a submissive and uneducated woman. She becomes the victim of the patriarchal society. After Harish's marriage with Virmati
once Kishori Devi meets Ganga personally and says it is in God's hand. We can just serve Him and nothing is in our hand. On hearing all these Ganga breaks:

The tears Ganga was determined not to show anybody, started pouring down her face. She buried her face between her raised knees, and wept as though her heart would break. 'What have I done,' she wailed, 'that God should punish me like this. 'You tell me, Amma,' demanded Ganga hoarsely, lifting her miserable, streaming eyes and runny nose to the older woman. 'Tell me, what did I do wrong?' (Difficult Daughters, 211)

**Images of Women in *A Married Woman***

*A Married Woman* offers different images of woman. Astha is the protagonist of the novel. Other images are - Astha's mother - Sita and Pipeelika Trivedi. The title of the novel implies that the novel and its characters centers upon the married woman, Astha.

**Asthana:**

Asthana is from her childhood days brought up in a homely atmosphere by her parents. She belongs to a middle class family. She is the only child in the home. Her mother considers her as a social burden. Her parents take care of her education, behaviour, health and marriage. Astha's family is traditional minded and they believe in rituals. Her father takes care of her education. He thinks, "If she did
well in her exams, she could perhaps sit for the IAS, and find a good husband there. You met all kinds of people in the administrative services..." (A Married Woman, 3) Her father always encourages her to study further. According to her father Astha has lots of potential. She can - draw, paint and read well. She has a very good academic record. In this way, in the beginning of the novel Manju Kapur develops her character. She is an obedient girl of her parents. Her father wants her to sit for IAS only to find a good husband. Her mother is always worrying about her daughters' marriage.

Asta was reading romantic novels when she was sixteen. She has started to think about her marriage. She is in search of 'true love' as found in romances. She enters in an affair with Bunty, a cadet of Defence Academy. When he comes in vacations he used to meet her. Kapur writes:

Day and night the thought of him kept her insides 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. (A Married Woman, 8)

But after sometime when Astha's mother informs Bunty's parents and the matter ends. After this, Astha started her second affair with Rohan. Manju Kapur describes their romantic moment:

She held her fists tensely out. Slowly he moved the thumb around her wrist, stroking the closed hand open. He kissed the fingers, nails, palms, he felt the small hair on the back
with his closed lips...After a little more of this he dropped her at their secret corner. (A Married Woman, 24)

But Astha protects her virginity and they don't cross the lines. But this relation ends as Rohan departs to Oxford for his further study. Astha notes her feeling in her private diary. Sita, Astha's mother finds it one day and reads about her feelings for Rohan. But Astha tells a lie to her mother and saves herself. But after that her parents starts taking interest in her reading matter. They don't allow Astha to write in her diary. Astha's parents behave like patriarchs. Diary is a personal matter; they should not have banned it. It is Astha's private matter. It is only with girls that parents behave so harshly. Boys would have been treated less harshly. Now her parents search bridegroom for her even more eagerly.

Asth a is in her final year when Hemant's proposal comes for her. He is an MBA, foreign-returned son of a bureaucrat. Astha's mental thinking is well captured well by Manju Kapur:

Asth a sat silent, twiddling her thumbs, staring down at her flat feet in their bathroom clippers. Had she known Rohan? Not really. And the soiled feeling she now associated with that interlude came over her again. (A Married Woman, 33)

A few weeks later engagement and in June wedding is to be held. By then Astha's MA exams will be over. After their wedding they go to Kashmir for their honeymoon. Hemant is calling her as 'my baby' and takes care of her. Their sex life is very interesting. Hemant has read a
sex manual to know the different styles and positions. Astha thinks that every boy wants a virgin life partner. For sometime her life is covered with fluid of sex. She wants nothing but sex. But after few months of her marriage, Kapur writes, "A few months and dullness began to taint Astha's new life. What was she to do while waiting for Hemant to come home? Her in-laws were not demanding, for the housework they had help, and supervision, no matter how painstaking, still left her with enough free to be restless in." (A Married Woman, 46)

A job of a teacher is a good pass-time for a married woman, think Astha's in-laws. She keeps herself busy in school while Hemant remains busy with his work. Their relation starts to sour day by day as Manju Kapur Writes:

Asth'a's desire receded. She felt cold, dreary and distanced from him. She had been waiting for him all day, thinking of their being together, but nothing of this was reciprocated.

He was a criminal, destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness. (A Married Woman, 50)

Asta gives birth to her first child - Anuradha. Now she has less time and space compare to earlier. But for her most shocking is Hemant's changed attitude. He always talks about children, her mother and his work. Astha feels lonely as they are not communicating as earlier. She is not about to tell Hemant about her situation as he has no time for her. After sometime she gives birth to a baby boy - Himanshu. Her family as every Indian family thinks that a boy can only take the
generation forward and not a girl. Her situation aptly described by Manju Kapur:

*It was in this two children, husband, servants, job scenario that Astha started to have headache.* *(A Married Woman, 74)*

To fight with her loneliness, she resumes writing poetry. She writes about love, rejection, desire and longing. Discussing her feelings with Hemant usually led both of them to argument. She in the struggle to express herself finds temporary relief in poetry. Now she has lost interest in Nature. She considers herself as older. Astha writes "*Changes*", a sad poem.

*The eventual release from pain*

*In the tearing relentless separation*

*From those in habit loved*

*Can come so slowly*

*It seems there will never be a day*

*Of final peace and tranquility...*

Her school invites The Street Theatre Group to hold workshop on their premises. Mrs. Dubey, the Principal, tells Astha that as Aijaz is here no need to worry about experience. For Aijaz any place is stage. Astha starts liking him while they are working together. She goes with him during his visits to slums and other places. Astha starts reading history books. Astha loves looking at Aijaz while he performs on the
stage. She wants to be always with him. When Aijaz invites Astha to her home she doesn't reply. So Aijaz feels:

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 right before her eyes. (A Married Woman, 114)

After some time riots occur in the city. The whole city is in curfew mode. The next day, headline of the newspaper is like this - Theatre Group Burned Alive in Van. Hemant gives Astha the newspaper but she is not able to read whole and tears from her eyes starts flowing. For Astha destiny plays as a game changer. Again she finds herself lonely. But soon she finds a good companion in Pipeelika. She is working with an NGO named Ujjala. Pipee is a widow of Aijaz. Astha decides to arrange an exhibition of paintings in the memory of Aijaz. Each artist of their group donates one painting for the exhibition. She gets a good recognition of her painting exhibition and remunerates thirty thousand rupees which is organized by the Manch. When Astha goes to holiday with her family she has a bad experience of Hemant. Hemant all the time counts money and expenses. Kapur writes:

Nine thousand and five hundred rupees spent on one of the worst weeks of my life, thought Astha, as she stepped into the hotel bus for the airport. She thought hopelessly of all the things she could have done with that money, of the
beautiful silver box she could have possessed and admired for ever. But their money spending was decided by him, not by her. (A Married Woman, 167)

Hemant is very dominating in his behaviour which makes Astha discomfort. He wants to dominate everything while she enjoys in sharing everything. Both are of completely different nature. But that is not the case with Pipeelika. She has many common qualities with Astha. Both enjoy each other's company. Manju Kapur narrates their relation slowly but acutely in the novel:

"They were sitting in Pipee's flat drinking beer before an early lunch. Pipee had made arrangements to go to work late and now she pulled Astha by the hand and led her to the bathroom mirror...Then she felt Pipee's hands in her hair, her clip undone, her hands framing the oval of her face, Lightly from behind she traced her eyebrows with her fingers, her nose, cheeks and mouth,...Pipee took a firmer grip of the hand in hers, and turned it over, stroking the back of it, gently sliding her rings off, and putting them on to her own fingers, maneuvering her bangles off and slipping them on her own more narrow wrist." (A Married Woman, 221-22)

By writing the above given lines Kapur is for the first time in Indian English literature depicts a lesbian relationship. It is very controversial. But at the end Astha makes up her mind when Hemant suffers a heart attack. She returns home to serve her family and
husband. But at her back she always thinks of Pipee. She stops herself from making a lesbian relationship with Pipee. And at last Pipee goes to US to follow her Ph.D.

Asthा's character is matured one. At the same time ambiguous also. One cannot guess her next step. Astha changes a lot from the beginning to the end of the novel. Her journey from childhood to womanhood is portrayed by Manju Kapur very carefully. As she involves herself in lesbian relationship she becomes one of the rarest characters in Indian English literature to tread on a path which is never treaded by anyone.

Pipeelika:

Pipeelika is introduced by Manju Kapur in the following lines:

Her name was Pipeelika Trivedi. She lived alone in Delhi, sufficiently isolated from conventional society to believe her choice of partner concerned only herself. Her mother was horrified when she learnt of her engagement. (A Married Woman, 117)

She is a social activist. She helps the poor. She is associated with the NGO named Ujjala. She is bold and free in her way of life. She faces lots of criticism when she engages with Aijaz Khan, a Muslim. Her mother horrified after hearing about her engagement. She lives alone in Delhi. She meets Aijaz Khan at a conference where she is reading a paper on the effects of communalism on the education of Muslim children in the basti. As he is a prime mover and shaker of The
Street Theatre Group, Pipee decides to stay connected with him. She likes her involvement in encouraging drama. As they meet frequently, love develops between them. They get married after hearing lots of criticism about their decision to marry. But her fate has some other plans for her as Aijaz is burnt alive with his drama crew by crazy mob during the riots. She becomes widow of Aijaz Kahn at a very young age. She

Pipee's life takes a big turn when she meets Astha. She has many qualities common with Astha. They understand each other very well. They share their feeling of joy, fear, anger, love and angst with each other. It is Ekta Yatra form Kashmir to Kanyakumari for the sake of communal harmony which brings them much closer to each other. As the time passes they involve themselves in a lesbian relationship. But at the end they separate as they have no future together.

**Sita:**

Sita is Astha's mother. She is a traditional woman. She believes in rituals. She argues with her husband very much. She often declares to Astha, "When you 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 death." (A Married Woman, 1) Every day she prays for a good husband to Astha. She becomes active when she learns about Astha's affair with Bunty. She informs Bunty's parents and ends her affair. She finds change in Astha after she gets admission in the Convent school.
She goes to Hrishikesh on a pilgrimage tour. She enjoys a lot there. She gives Hemant her money to invest them safely. She remains calm when her husband dies. She has always enchanted and echoed her daughter the lines from the Bhagwadgita throughout the novel in the following manner:

Dear Beta, perform action with the full understanding that you have no control over the result. Success and failure have to be faced by everyone....The meaning of life is struggle. There are challenges in all walks of life, how to tackle is the question, not to run away from home, work, society and obligations. Perform your duties with detachment. Learn to give and not take. (A Married Woman, 88)

In this way, in Sita, Manju Kapur has portrayed a pious woman, who longs for her daughter's marriage and eventually gets what she wanted. She is tradition bounded. Her character is a quite a typical one.

**Images of Women in Home**

Home is a family saga which presents many women in a joint family. Nisha is its protagonist. It can be described as Nisha's journey from childhood to mother hood. Sona and Rupa are other important characters of the novel.
Nisha:

Nisha is a daughter of Sona and Yashpal. The novel describes her development. Through her character Manju Kapur tries to represent an age old view that for a girl her beauty is her destiny. Nisha is a very charming girl. She belongs to the Lala Banwari Lal's reputed family. During their childhood days, all sibling used to play with one another.

Vicky likes Nisha so he always plays with her. Due to lack of attention from Sona's side, Vicky gives full attention to Nisha, her cousin. Vicky's conduct towards Nisha is cruel and dirty. One day on the terrace when Nisha wants him to play chess with her, Vicky touches her soft thighs. As he enjoys its softness, he touches her private parts. But she does not divulge this secret to anyone. As Vicky tells her after his heinous conduct:

_We are not going to tell anybody about this,' he whispered, holding her. 'This is our secret. See, you have done su-su.(57)..."It's our secret. If you tell anyone, they will beat you and me.' He gripped her arm. 'No one must ever know._

_No one. You understand._ (Home, 58)

Nisha's psyche is brutally hurts after this terrifying incident. The thoughts of this incident hover around her mind like a dark cloud. Kapur writes, _"In the days that followed, Nisha grew silent. For the first time she felt divided from the family she had so unthinkingly be part of._" (Home, 59) Nisha grows silent and gives up food. She begins to scream at night. Nobody tries to find out the reality. She looks pale and sick every time. Sona discusses this problem with her sister Rupa.
Rupa takes Nisha at her home. She finds herself in completely new surroundings from the one she has been living. As they are childless, they shower their full love on Nisha. Nisha completes her schooling at Rupa's home. Manju Kapur writes:

*The pattern of Nisha's next ten years was now set. She spent all week with her aunt and uncle. A rickshaw picked her up, took her to school, dropped her back. When she spent weekends with her parents, her father made sure that Vicky was never close to her.* (Home, 74)

Now at her Home, Nisha enters DBC as a BA student with confidence. It is during her journey to the campus that Nisha really feels grown up. Kapur writes, "*She returned to college feeling adventurous, daring, and modern. For the first time she had interacted socially with an unrelated male.*" (Home, 144) She goes to college by a University's special bus for its students. During her journey, one day she meets Suresh. They fall in love. They start meeting on daily basis. They are bunking their college classes to spend time with each other. On one day, a letter from college authority arrives. Nisha is found short of attendance and her term will not be granted for examination. But her parents produce fake medical certificate for Nisha to convince school authority to grant her term for examination. Her father rejects Suresh as her future son-in-law and 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)

Many restrictions are put on her by her family members because they don't want blot on their family's name so they are doing all this. Kapur writes:

*All day she remained in the house, a prisoner of her deed, a prisoner of their words. She was distrusted too much to be allowed to put a foot outside. A padlock was put on the phone, only incoming calls could be received without the key.* (Home, 200)

After three years of her departure with Suresh, she will have to think and adjust about another man than Suresh. Soon Nisha begins to notice that her skin has started irritating and she begins scrubbing it. She suffers from the problem of skin eczema. As a result of it, she is not able to pass her time. She thinks that she will be mad sitting inside the house, as loneliness hurts her. Her mother Sona develops a headache as she is attending regularly with Nisha the cure center for her daughter. Nisha thinks that it is due to emotional causes. Aamer Hussein rightly remarks:

"Kapur's ability to chart sexual abuse and disease in the same detached style in which she narrates daily adventures is remarkable. Nisha's childhood experiences with a cousin
mark her for life, as the skin condition that nearly ruins her chances of marriage is probably a psychosomatic response." (The Independent - Article)

After recovering, Nisha wants to do business in her own way. Her mother is not happy with the new development in her life. But she has already decided that she will not listen to her mother. She defies her mother and also family. Nisha wants to follow a path which is never followed by any women of Banwari Lal family. She thinks positively about her life as she is going to get economical freedom. Her new shop is named as 'Nisha's Creation'. Nisha hires a tailor named Mohseen Khan. She begins by making salwar suits. Rupa masi helps her on important issues. She gets settled in the market by taking care of each and every aspect of her business very minutely. Nisha is earning very well and she pays her debt within a year to her father. She handles all the difficulties of her business tactfully. Here we see Nisha emerging as a successful business woman. Shivani Vashisht states very aptly:

"The novel resonates with the theme of economic independence of women who act against the traditional joint family value system. Generally families adhering to the conventional values objected to women folk stepping out of the houses and confined them inside. Nisha keen to uplift herself and to establish her identity and individuality gets educated to establish her own business."

(Vashisht, 4)
Yshapal, Nisha's father recognizes her daughter's business skills. He knows that she is more brilliant, intelligent and independent than Raju. But still he feels that her daughter's real happiness lies at her future in-laws' home. So he starts the search for her husband. They want a mangli husband for her as she is a mangli by horoscope. But Nisha puts forward a condition that she will be allowed to do her business after marriage. But her mother tells that they are looking for a daughter-in-law, wife and mother. They will not want a business woman like her. Thus, Nisa is ready to marry but on her own terms, she is not prepare to marry anybody at the cost of her business career. After a long wait, a marriage proposal arrives for her from the boy’s side. He is a widower in his early thirties. His name is Arvind. He is a mangli also. But Nisha doesn’t want to get married. She has lost interest in life. At the end, she agrees to marry him as per her parents’ choice. She is worried about her freedom only. She thinks her freedom should not be touched. She discusses with him her business on their first meeting. She makes it clear that she will work even after getting married. Nisha is a new woman who wants her freedom at any cost. Nisha finds herself trapped after her marriage with Arvind. She is not able to look after her business properly. For Nisha marriage is a escape route from problems. But things do not go on smoothly with her in Arvind's home. She is asked to look after her old mother-in-law. They are also expecting from Nisha a baby as soon as possible. She thought she would be free after her marriage with him. Arvind and her mother-in-law never think about her business. She even has to take her mother-
in-law's permission to go at her home in Karol Bagh. After some time, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to twin babies. All she tells that she wants to work during her pregnancy but no one allows her to work. She cries a lot but she is told that it is not good for babies. So it is decided that first she looks after her babies and then after few years she will looks after her business.

At the end she feels her husband Arvind has betrayed her as he forgets his promise to let her work even after her marriage. She feels very sad at the end. But Kapur ends the novel thus:

"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, 336)

**Sona and Rupa:**

Manju Kapur begins her novel *Home* by introducing Sona and Rupa in the following manner:

*Mrs. Sona Lal and Mrs. Rupa Gupta, sisters both, were childless. One was rich, the other poor, one the eldest daughter-in-law of a cloth-shop owner, the other the wife of an educated, badly paid government servant. (Home, 1)*

Sona and Rupa are sisters. Sona marries Yashpal and Rupa marries Prem Nath. Rupa is not wealthy and still they have lots of expenses. Both are craving for a child. So Rupa says to Sona:
We are cursed, Did, what to do? It is our fate. Perhaps it is just as well we don't have children, that man will trouble us life after life. (Home, 1)

Sona and Rupa have to face many difficulties in their personal lives because of their specific social backgrounds. Rupa has difficulties that are easily narrated. Sona's problems are of joint family's common problem. Sona's marriage is an arranged one. The eldest son of the Banwari Lal family, Yashpal falls in love with her. As Sona's parents are not wealthy, there occurs much discussion. Sona all the time thinks about him and he also does the same. Yashpal gives his father’s address and asks him to talk about their marriage otherwise he will leave shop and will spend his whole life on the banks of Ganga. But the Banwari Lal family is a traditional one and they do not accept such marriage. But at the end of all of this, they get married and now live their life happily.

Rupa is shown as a wise woman who accepts bitter realities of life and changes herself accordingly. Manju Kapur writes:

*Without children, Rupa had the time to start a little pickle business. Her husband encouraged her, her father-in-law helped her paste on the labels with a trembling hand, her brother-in-law helped her with his contact among the shopkeepers of Karol Bagh. As long as her products were good, orders were plentiful. Rupa worked hard at her recipes, experimenting with new ones and expanding her repertoire. (Home, 16)*
Though Rupa is unable to be a mother, she is welcomed by her family. When Sona is not able to conceive a child, she is advised by her husband to adopt Vicky. But she doesn't want to do so. She tells her husband that it is a rebellious steps. She doesn't speak anything but she wants her own child only. But Rupa consoles her and tells her to look at her husband's generosity. He wants her to be happy at any cost. Sona suffers harassment from her mother-in-law. She wants to fly out of the cage but she can't. When Nisha is sexually assaulted by Vicky, she doesn't tells about that to anybody not even to her mother, Sona. She is not able to understand Nisha's changed behaviour over night. She worries a lot for her daughter. She tells Rupa about Nisha's strange behaviour and asks her to take Nisha to her home.

Sona and Rupa never clash with each other but they understand each other very well. They share their sufferings and moments of happiness. Rupa takes Nisha to her home and completes her schooling there.

Images of Women in *The Immigrant*

*The Immigrant* is a fourth novel of Manju Kapur. It describes the live of two immigrants - one a husband and other a wife. Nina is the protagonist of the novel. She is married with Ananda, a dentist in Canada.
Nina:

The novel opens with the description of Nina, a young girl in her thirties waiting to be married. Her marriage is the topic of conversation for her mother and relatives. All of them are always worried about her unmarried status - who, whom and how it will happen? According to Simone de Beauvoir, marriage is not the only honourable career option available to women:

*There is an unanimous agreement that getting a husband-or in some cases a ‘protector’- is for her the most important of undertakings. In her eyes man incarnates the Other, as she does for the man; but this Other seems to her to be on the plane of essential, and with reference to him she sees herself as the inessential. She will free herself from the paternal home, from her mother's hold, she will open up her future, not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master.* (Beauvoir, 449)

She is a lecturer in Delhi's Miranda House College. She teaches English literature in her college. She lives with her widowed mother, Mrs. Batra in a single room unit in Jangpura area. She is unmarried and is waiting for a suitable groom. Her entire body reminds her of her unmarried status. She longs to feel young in these situations and looks forward to the gifts, the surprises and love in marriage. She is desperately waiting to be married. She being educated is not ready to exchange her life for any humdrum marriage. Her mother regularly
gives advertisement in the newspaper for her marriage. As much time is passed, her family is losing the hope of her marriage. Her mother's dull and mournful eyes witness this fear.

When her birthday comes, her mother wishes her. Nina wants someone special to wish her birthday in a romantic way. "Zenobia, special friend, gave Nina a small bottle of perfume."

Zenobia, abandoned by her husband after her six years of married life. She is living independently in flat with parent's help. She asks Nina to apply for PhD but Nina says no, "But all the desperation in the world could not make Nina apply for a PhD." Nina's mother visits an astrologer after tiring in her task of searching a good partner for her daughter. Right from her early days Nina is fascinated by the foreign culture and lifestyle. She hates most the atmosphere she finds herself in. She doesn't like her grandparents' house at Lucknow and Loreto convenant. She thinks that The International Academy in Brussels is her real school and Europe her real home. Her mother hopes that her son-in-law- will provide her everything she wants.

Nina fell in love while doing her MA. She keeps this relationship a secret from her mother. Nina is aware of the romantic world through English literature so she is looking for love on her own terms unattained by tradition and convention. As she is a respected woman, she doesn't want to be treated badly by any person. Nina and her mother are destined to live their lives without male company after the death of her father. Mrs. Batra knows that after her daughter's
marriage, she will become lonelier but still she wants her to get married as early as possible.

Finally, the marriage proposal comes for Nina. An NRI named Ananda living in Canada. Nina is excited about the proposal. Seeds of happy married life start to grow in Nina's mind. She is seeing herself as a bride and mistress in her near future. The happiness which she is craving for a long time, is coming to reality. Nina thinks she needs to be well settled and secured after her marriage. He thinks of her father who provided all facilities to her while he was alive. But overall she feels very happy as her life is going to settle with an NRI. But when she meets her friend Zenobia, Nina says:

"Zen, I don't even know him—though he seems quite keen. And that too after living in the West for seven years. How can I be sure there is nothing wrong with him?" 'You can't,' said the friend sapiently. 'Though he doesn't seem a murderer or a rapist, nor could he have a wife tucked away somewhere. No parents putting pressure,' 'Why has he been single so long?' (The Immigrant, 73)

Nina though being a well educated profession, decides to settle her life with an arrange marriage. She is brought up in conventional manner. She gives much importance to her family and marriage. She in spite of being an economically independent girl accepts the proposal. It shows her maturity and respect for her family. Both Nina and Ananda want a court marriage as it costs less with less trouble. On the advice of Alka, simple ceremony is held at Arya Samaj Mandir. For this
ceremony Nina takes a loan against her college provident fund. And she is determined to pay for the wedding and subsequent breakfast.

After the marriage, the bridal couple leaves for the honeymoon destination, the Oberoi Hotel. In her first encounter with her husband, Nina notices Ananda's problem of early ejaculation. Nina's dream of enjoying their sexual life to the satisfactory level remains far off. Nina consoles herself by saying that in a married life, sex is not everything. She comes to the conclusion that their togetherness is much important than anything else. Even on the second night after their marriage, problem occurs with Ananda. When Nina comes out of bathroom, she finds Ananda sleeping. She tries to wake him by cluttering around noisily as she drank water and put off the lamp but it was of no use. She snuggles next to him; tries to shake him a little, still no result and she hears only voice of his snoring loudly. As she can't do anything, she falls asleep. After two day, she visits her college:

_Nina returned to Miranda House a married woman. On the surface everything was the same: address, students, classes, bus routine, masses of corrections, department meetings, third term anxiety about exams. She never anticipated though the respect that came with marriage, a tiny shift in focus, and there it was: Nina Sharma, an accepted member of society, married, bound for the Western big time._ (The Immigrant, 99)

After some time spending in India, the couple leaves for Canada. Ananda is a citizen of Canada which becomes a legitimate home for
Nina. In spite of her husband being a Canadian citizen, Nina finds that the political boundaries never allow citizens of other countries to enter freely. So she should acquire a visa for herself. So Nina and Ananda go to the Canadian Embassy along with their wedding invitation, wedding photographs and the marriage certificate that the registrar has given them. Nina now becomes the respectable member of the society. She finds marriage as a fine thing in her life. While Ananda tells her about their flat at Halifax, Nina thinks that in marriage the only important thing is togetherness. Ananda and his wife Nina are second generation of immigrants. Nina enters Canada not in search of either a career or a degree, she enters as a wife. Those immigrants who come as a wife are facing more troubles. Nina too has to face it. Initially, there is no work for her in Canada. She has to wait for her husband to come home. She is not able to pass her free time with books. At this juncture of her life, she realizes she is an immigrant for her life. Ruth Scurr explains the challenges of being a wife thus:

Kapur explores the special challenges facing immigrant wives: the way a young woman's life, already so pressured in professional and reproductive terms, becomes an even more impossible balancing act inside a foreign culture.

(Scurr Review The Immigrant)

She asks Ananda for her job but he cunningly rejects it. The idea of his wife doing any job is unacceptable for him. Nina always follows his orders and advices. Ananda's sex life is totally based on anesthetic spray that he uses to keep his penis erected. Without this spray he is
unable to have an intercourse. Nina never complains to him. As Nina is not able to conceive, she visits professional therapists. Nina and Ananda give their test and both tests are declared normal. Nina feels that her own baby will complete her dream of happy home. Every time they do sex, she imagines that her egg fertilizes and every period is a result of miscarriage. When Nina's dream of becoming a mother is shattered, she opts to work in a library. Bharati Khairnar states:

*Manju Kapur presents an absorbing study of several psychological factors which contributes to a barren marital relationship between Nina and Ananda. Intimacy, passion and commitment, which form the bedrock of a successful marital relationship, are conspicuous by their absence in the couple's relationship as a result of which their marriage runs into troubled waters.* (Khairnar, 54)

After some time she comes to know that the problem lies with Ananda as his sexual disability is not going to end very soon. Ananda's sexual dysfunction causes unhappiness in their life. The distance between them starts to grow. Sex is the basic form of communication between a husband and a wife but they fail even here. According to Manju Kapur the want of children is lacking in this marriage. As a result of it, Nina joins women's self help group to escape the bitter realities of their life. Nina learns many things in the women's group. These days Nina reads Simone De Beauvoir's seminal text on feminism *'The Second Sex'*. 
In the library of the school, Nina is introduced to many new people. Anton is one of them. They like each other's company. Due to Ananda's sexual dysfunction, she is not able to enjoy her sexual life fully, so she involves herself in a sexual relationship with Anton. According to her, their relationship was just a meeting of bodies. But once after dinner party, Anton rapes her. In the summer Nina visits India. She shares everything with her friend Zenobia. She is the first person to be sympathetic to her. She understands Nina properly and concludes that Nina's life has become almost schizophrenic. Nina breaks completely on hearing about the death of her mother. Now she feels herself very lonely. As she is already involved in an affair, Nina is unable to blame her husband.

Nina finds her anchor in Ananda. And the price she pays for loneliness and denial. At the end of the novel Manju Kapur uses the imagery of playing cards to show Nina's complete surrender. She says, "I pack, pack, pack" (The Immigrant, 327)

**Images of Women in Custody**

In *Custody*, Manju Kapur has presented the images of modern middle class Indian women. Here two chief protagonists - Shagun and Ishita represent extra-marital affair and infertility respectively. Both are devastated although through different reasons. The theme of children's custody is subtly woven with the diverse effects of divorce and re-marriage on children. Apart from two protagonists, we find life like images of middle aged women - Mrs. Sabharwal and Mrs. Kaushik.
Shagun:

Shagun meets us in the very beginning of the novel, making love with her husband's boss in the lanes of Delhi. From her first appearance in the novel, one can assume the kind of liberty she enjoys although being a married woman and mother of two children. The angst of the urban middle class women is portrayed in a meticulous manner by Kapur. Through Shagun, Kapur tries to depict the problems faced by urban middle class married women. She is a free minded and liberated woman. She loves to follow her heart. She can do anything to fulfill her desire for materialistic pleasure. Maneesha Govender rightly calls her, 'worldly wife'.

She is brought up by her mother, Mrs. Sabharwal. Being an only child of her parents, she enjoys a lot of freedom while growing up. Kapur comments, "She graduated from Jesus and Mary College and put away her books with relief. She hadn't really liked studying though she had done reasonably well. She was looking forward to the freedom marriage would provide." (Custody, 27) She is a typical middle class woman who wants to have freedom through the rout of marriage. She even puts her study aside for getting married. During her college, she falls in love with Raman. When Raman's family comes to see her, Mrs. Kaushik, Raman's mother, says, "Even after you marry, I do not see this woman in the kitchen." (Custody, 22) They get married. Shagun wants to meet films stars and to attend high-class parties. Their life is going very smoothly. She is a beauty while he is a brain. When Arjun is around eight year old, Shagun becomes pregnant again. Kapur
comments, "Shagun was distraught. There might have been empty spaces in her life, but this was not how she chose to fill them". *(Custody, 17)* Shagun argues with Raman and says, "It's not that, I'll be thirty, Arjun is just becoming independent, I don't want to start all over again. Always tied to a child, is that you want?" *(Custody, 18)*

Finally, Shagun gives birth to a baby. She is named Roohi. Kapur comments, "Right from the beginning it was clear that Baby Roohi was a carbon copy of her father." *(Custody, 18)* Raman and Shagun argues about Roohi's looks. At one party Shagun meets Ashok Kahnna, boss of Raman. Form their first meeting, they feel attracted toward each other. She feels that she should move on in her life. She is a 'New Woman' of Manju Kapur. She is fully comfortable in venturing out of her marital role. They starts meeting regularly. The first target of the strained relationship becomes their youngest child Roohi. To meet Ashok regularly, she even suggests Raman putting one and half year Roohi to play school. Although Raman disapproves of the idea, Shagun remains unconvinced of his idea. And finally Roohi joins the toddler's. The distance between her and Raman starts widening day by day-

> *At night when he tried to pull her towards him, she again resisted, 'I am really tired.' 'We haven't done it for weeks, That's not fair, Shagu, If anyone should be tired, it's me.* *(Custody, 47)*

Although she has a handsome, highly paid husband and two loving children still she is attracted to Ashok Khanna. All her energy is now being spent of keeping her relationship a secret. She has to be
vigilant all the time and to find new excuses regularly. Slowly and slowly, she begins to justify her absence from home. Her life is divided in to two parts - inner and outer. The appearance of Shagun now worries Raman. Her skin is glowing like anything. Raman feels disheartened on seeing her like this. Raman is continuously rejected by her in bed. Raman works hard to give his wife and children a comfortable living. She has all that a woman of her status craves for. And yet she is not satisfied. One day she tells her husband that she wants something else in life. From that point onwards he begins to suspect her activities.

One day Raman tells her about the distance that causes him unhappiness. Shagun mockingly says, "'Distance?' she laughed as she drew her hand away.'it is you who keep travelling. How can you talk about my distance?" (Custody, 49) Raman gets heart attack on learning about her relation with Ashok Khanna. After that there is not remained much for Shagun in her home. Mr. Sabharwal, her mother warns her about the consequences of this illicit relationship. But she overhears her advices. At one night she leaves her home without letting anyone know. At one point Shagun who cannot wait for the court to declare the result for the case regarding divorce, calls Raman and proposes divorce by mutual consent. Shagun offers him to take the children and give her divorce. As he rejects her offer, she starts blackmailing him by not sending Roohi to him, citing medical reasons. Eventually he gives divorce to her. The custody of Arjun is given to Shagun by court. Now she uses her son as pawns of the game to get the custody of Roohi also.
Thus the long battle for custody begins. The court has now become the battle field for both Shagun and Raman to fight.

Manju Kapur believes that the consequences of the events are more important than the event itself. Shagun and Ashok depart for New York. Raman's mother blames her son for his patience. After sometime Shagun feels lonely after Ashok leaves for office. She always misses Arjun and Roohi. She notices the fragility in her second marriage also. In a letter to her mother Shagun repents about leaving Raman and children for Ashok. She wants her children back so that she can makes up for her mistakes.

Shagun in the pursuit of materialistic pleasure defies her mother also. It is Mrs. Sabharwal who first recognizes something wrong with her daughter's married life. Shagun also does not like her mother as she manages good relation with Raman. In this way the mother - daughter dichotomy is depicted through their relation. Shruti Raavindran rightly remarks:

"Kapur's dissection of South and East Delhi manners will continue to be of relevance as long as there are mothers so anxious to 'settle' their daughters, they pay leener attention to their body clocks than their selves".

Ishita

Ishita Rajora is the second protagonist of the novel. When she is born, Kapur writes:
"The child was a beauty, she said, and so sweet-tempered, her future home would rejoice. This pleased Mrs. Rajora, even though she that Ishita was sweet rather than preeti, and that without a dowry her qualities, both outer and inner, had to be sole attraction." (Custody, 52)

Ishita's infancy is marked by illness. She is only four when she is diagnosed with TB. She is on TB drugs for consecutive nine months. It makes her vulnerable to the waves of cold, cough and fever. Her parents take her to different doctors, hakims and vaids for her curing. Eventually she grows stronger. Ishita is not interested in early marriage. She has just finished her B.A. and wants to follow B.Ed. as it a useful degree. She thinks:

"B.Ed., a degree that would always be useful. If she got a job in a government school, she would have security, a steady income, as well as the lighter hours that future matrimony demanded." (Custody, 52)

Ishita has begun to apply for teaching posts when Suryakanta's marriage proposal is received. They family is a conservative merchant one. Their caste is same. The boy is twenty five year old, shy and inarticulate. They saythat they want homely housewife for their son. They also don’t want dowry as they have enough money. But Kapur asserts. "Suryakanta was their only son, and grandchildren were expected within a year." (Custody, 53) Ishita hesitates in the beginning as her future in-laws asserts:
"The women of the family didn't work, daughters-in-laws were obviously expected to devote themselves to home."

(Custody, 53)

But what about her desire to study further and be independent asks Kapur. In a traditional and conservative country like India, it is always a mother, daughter or daughter-in-law has to suffer in hand of the patriarchs of the society. But at the end everything goes perfectly well and they get married in summer. But it is after eighteen months of their marriage that family members start talking about her pregnancy.

Her mother-in-law takes her to meet many gynecologists, hakima, vaids and so on. It is found in test that Ishita has TB in her childhood and that is why she is having trouble in conceiving. Her mother-in-law feels cheated and wants to talk with her mother.

But after her re-marriage with Raman, she takes care of Roohi very much. She is very kind and soft spoken towards Roohi. Roohi finds in Ishita a perfect mother. Ishita's character is bit different from other characters of Manju Kapur, as she scarcely revolts. She is a typical marriage material for many men due to her calm, tender, soft, loving, and caring nature.

Mrs. Sabharwal

Mrs. Sabharwal is a mother of Shagun. As her husband passes away early, Shagun is brought up by her. She gives Shagun ample opportunities to study. She is a conventional woman. She enjoys good relation with her son-in-law Raman. Shagun doesn't like her mother's
closeness with Raman. She always takes the side of Raman whenever there is an argument between them. Manju Kapur describes her relation with Raman in the following manner:

Mrs. Sabharwal, Shagun's mother, got along excellently with Raman. For twelve years he had been more son than son-in-low. (*Custody*, 25)

She tells Shagun about Raman's family's good qualities whenever Shagun worries about her in-laws family. She tells Shagun:

*Beta, such a good match,' the mother couldn't help repeating, 'so reliable he is, you will never have to worry about a thing. Your life will be comfortable, secure and safe.* (*Custody*, 27)

It is Mrs. Sabharwal who first recognizes something wrong between her daughter and Ashok Khanna. But she keeps silence instead she should talk with her daughter and ask her to leave Ashok. Now people can say what they want as she remains silent. She has nurtured Shagun by her own hands. She wants to be a perfect mother for her daughter. At a time when she needs somebody to help her, no one comes forward, so now she is behaving as she feels right. When Raman complains to her about Shagun's changed behaviour, she goes to Shagun and pursues her to think about her relation with Ashok. She says:

*Beti, have you ever thought of the consequences of your actions? Even if you don't care for Raman, for heaven's sake preserve some appearances. You think all wives love*

In this way, the images of women are reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. Her women want their own sky to fly high. They want to achieve their goal at any cost.


