

**Critiquing Family as an Institution in *Difficult Daughters*
and
*Unaccustomed Earth***

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by

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CERTIFICATE

I declare that the dissertation entitled “CRITIQUING FAMILY AS AN INSTITUTION IN *DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS AND UNACCUSTOMED EARTH*,” has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Paramjit Singh Ramana, Professor and Dr. Rajinder Kumar Sen, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab. No part of this dissertation has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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CERTIFICATE

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ABSTRACT

Critiquing Family as an Institution in Difficult Daughters and Unaccustomed Earth

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Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri, both contemporary writers, hailing from middle class strata of society take women from the middle class as their subjects who have nothing dramatic or larger than life scenario about their lives but are domestic women leading ordinary day to day life. Despite their apparent geographical, cultural and contextual differences the predicaments of women that they reflect in their writings show some similarities. Family being an important unit forms the backdrop in both writers in which they place their women protagonists. The present study is an attempt to compare Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri as feminist writers who react almost identically having been placed in different native contexts to woman's problems. The technique that both use as writers is different with one writing her best in a short story and the other in prose using almost similar themes with family forming an integral part of their works. The study brings forth that Manju Kapur is a 'feminist' writer whereas Jhumpa Lahiri is a 'feminine' writer. Manju talks of women's body, spaces, and their psyche as the main highlight whereas Lahiri talks not of gender but of generations and relations. Manju's women are found in confined places like kitchen, the dressing room, or the attic where Virmati was locked whereas Lahiri's women are placed in open spaces with all exposure but still they meet the same fate. Lahiri and Manju do not out rightly deny the hope of harmony in family by expounding on the notions of relations and family in their respective works.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Social and ideological discourses of a particular historical and geographic location constitute both its women and men, but the position of women as a subservient, submissive, dormant segment of the population is almost a universal phenomenon throughout the world today. In most cultural and ideological discourses in different patriarchal societies, the male is presented as naturally all-powerful, active, acquisitive, intelligent, productive being who possesses the rational faculties while women are socially constructed as the submissive, passive, inquisitive, irrational and ignorant entities. Literature has been playing a vital role in augmenting this gender inequality as also other social and ideological institutions like family, school, religion, law and cultural conventions etc. The history of representation of the miserable plight of woman can be traced even in the ancient literature including the Greek literature. In Greek history roles of woman as mother and homemaker were considered diminutive and not worth recording. In literature too woman enjoyed a pitiable marginal place. Hesiod in Pandora's myth represents a misogynic notion of woman holding her responsible for all evil and misery:

For of old the tribes of men lived on the earth apart from evil and grievous toil and sore diseases that bring the fates of death to men. For in the day of evil men speedily wax old. But the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and made a scattering thereof and devised baleful sorrows for men. (qtd. in Padia 2)

The position of woman kept on deteriorating further even during the time of Pericles - a time which saw colossal cultural accomplishments. In one of his funeral speeches, Pericles fortified the isolation of woman. A section of the speech goes like:

If I must say anything on the subject of female excellence to those of you who will now be in widowhood it will be all comprised in this brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men, whether for good or for bad. (qtd. in Halsall)

This isolation of woman was furthered by Aristotle, one of the greatest of philosophers. He stated that, “the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” and that “we should look upon the female state, as it were, a deformity, one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature. On account of its weakness it quickly approaches its maturity and old age since inferior things all reach their end more quickly” (qtd. in Krishnaswamy 73). John Donne in “Air and Angels” alludes to Aquinas's theory referring to form as masculine and matter feminine: “the superior, godlike, male intellect impresses its form upon the inert female matter” (qtd. in Krishnaswamy 74). Balzac says, “Woman is a slave that one must learn to place upon a throne by showering her with fragrances. Men celebrate the Muse and exult in the inaccessible Madonna and Angel” (qtd. in Padia 6).

Religion has generally been no less hostile to women. With the establishment of Christianity and the collapse of Roman Empire, woman's position declined even more with Biblical interpretations locating straightforwardly all blame on 'Eve' for the downfall of humanity. As Padia puts it, “theological statements of the time still echoed the theme of man's superiority over woman” (5). To emphasize her point she quotes Carmody: woman is subordinate to man because she bears greater responsibility for the curse that came with the original sin; women are simply to provide procreation and companionship to men; the natural order assigns women only those functions that correspond to her sexual and procreative organs; and adulterous women should be stoned to death, but unfaithful husbands are not subject to any punishment (qtd. in Padia 5). Even in Indian theological texts, most of the time, woman has remained a subject of disgrace, humiliation and shame. In Brahmanical text, *The Satapatha Brahmana*, where, on one hand, woman shares equal responsibility with man, on the other hand, there are representations voicing a totally different perspective. Prabhu presents this view:

...in the same Brahmana, there is another passage which shows that woman is regarded as intellectually inferior to man, or rather, that she is regarded as more emotional and less rational by nature than man; therefore she is apt to fall an easy prey to external appearances; she lacks the ability for true appreciation or balance of mind and does not possess depth of reason. (259)

Even the merciful, benign female deities of Lakshmi and Parvati in Hinduism are accompanied by the ferocious Divine males reinforcing the idea that only a feminine figure needs to be shown by the side of an 'all-powerful' man. It is this image of woman - reinforced by literature and by the institutions (socio-political) controlled by male world, the 'patriarchy', - that a handful of women arose against endeavouring to have for woman a place at par with man in society.

This endeavour came to be projected in the form of a movement for the equality of women called feminism. Feminism goes beyond that. It is a political movement. It has a critical stance: Political- as, like Marxism, it ought to bring a change in society with woman enjoying equal rights with men, social, political, legal etc. Feminism "aims at liberation" of women (Scholz 3). Critical- as it questions, inquires, debunks elements that reinforce the suppression of women. Feminist activity is divided into three phases namely- first, second and third wave feminisms respectively. The First-wave feminism refers to feminist activity in U.K., Canada, and the United States during the late 19th and early twentieth century. It focused primarily on gaining women's suffrage (the right to vote) rights emblematic of a woman's democratic rights. The "second-wave" of the Women's Liberation Movement started in the United States beginning in 1960s and lasted till late 1970s. At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that whereas the focus of first-wave feminism was basically on overturning legal obstacles to equality (i.e. voting rights, property rights), second-wave feminism addressed a relatively wider range of issues which included social and economic inequalities, official/legal inequalities, sexuality, family, the workplace, and, perhaps most controversially, reproductive rights. The Third-wave feminism began in 1980s and continues in the present, the early twenty-first century. It was a result of the successes as well the backlashes of the second-wave era. The Reagen-Thatcher era was not in favour of equal rights to women and some of the achievements made by the second wave feminists were in a way taken away.

The issues of colour, class and race particularly those of women from the Third World countries became central to third-wave feminism. Nonetheless, like the previous waves, third-wave feminism did not encompass a single feminist idea. The currents of feminism were felt in many countries- USA, France, Africa, England and other countries.

There are some critical disagreements on the incorporation of ideas from poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and Marxist theories among feminists but there are also certain assumptions and concepts that underlie all feminisms. M. H. Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* gives these assumptions. Firstly, he says that the basic view is that “Western civilization, is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father) - that is, it is male centred and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic”. Secondly, it is widely held that, “while one’s sex as a man and woman is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender- of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in temperament and behaviour- are largely, if not entirely, social constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization”. Most importantly, he further argues that, “this patriarchal ideology pervades those writings which have been traditionally considered great literature, and which until recently have been written mainly by men for men” (94).

According to N. Krishnaswamy, the feminist movement of today gets a focus in writings of women that he classifies into three categories: “Work in the area of ‘women’s studies’/Feminism (research and studies in general about the problems of women in social, cultural, economic, linguistic and other areas); Women’s writing, mostly literary”; and “Feminist Criticism” (75).

Feminist Literary Criticism since the 1960s has transformed the way we look at literature by male writers as well as women. Feminism as a mode of critical thought has radically brought a change in the academia altering the way of analysis of literary texts, the canon of literature, as also the processes of reception, critical appreciation and reviewing. Beauvoir in the ‘Introduction’ to her book *The Second Sex* states:

One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be. ‘What has become of women?’... (13)

To fiddle with questions pertaining to identity and space has always been an active part in the life of women writers as writers and women. But it was as a development of second-wave-feminism, a term for the Women’s Liberation Movement in

the United States and Europe that feminist literary criticism emerged in the academy, though, not in the present state and form. Feminist literary criticism, virtually literary from the beginning is vital as it questions the representation of women promulgated through literature and endeavours to combat it. But feminist literary criticism of the 1960s, did not erupt all of a sudden but was an outcome of the endeavours of the tradition of feminist writings, as Virginia Woolf puts it, "For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (62). Many significant writers like Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Olive Schreiner with her *Women and Labour* (1911), Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simone De Beauvoir in her seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949) and Kate Millet's trailblazer *Sexual Politics* (1970) contributed to the emergence of feminist literary criticism as a separate and distinct discipline. There have also been some male contributions to this tradition with John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Woman* (1869) and Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). According to Peter Barry, feminist criticism underwent three phases which he defines in chronological terms: namely that of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s with a change in the motives of the movement in all three different phases. The phase of 1960s concerned itself particularly with books and literature which is seen as a mode of influencing a large readership in turn manoeuvring their beliefs and conduct. Betty Freidan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* observes:

The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home. The magazine surely does not leave out sex; the only passion, the only pursuit, the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man. It is crammed full of food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, and the physical bodies of young women, but where is the world of thought' and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit? In the magazine image women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man. (30)

And Peter Barry commenting on the representations of women in literature observes,

The representation of women in literature, then, was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialisation', since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. (122)

Femininity, thus, came to be defined in terms of representations in literature by men restricting women to be housewives and mothers. In the next phase of polemical 1970s, efforts were made to expose the methods employed by male and female writers to establish an inequality in society for women. Considering Patricia Meyer Sparks as the first to notice the shift in attention for feminist critics from androtexts (texts by men) to gynotexts (texts by women), Elaine Showalter in her essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", coined the term 'gynocritics', referring to the process of "the study of women as writers", the subjects being "history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition" (Showalter 184). The 1980s saw feminist criticism undergoing a massive change. Firstly, it became more selective i.e. selected and drew upon ideas from other critical approaches like Structuralism, Marxism etc. Secondly, there came a shift in focus from combating male perceptions of the world to reconstructing the female version of the world and bringing forth the experience by women. Thirdly, feminist critics constructed a canon of women's writing by reconstructing the history of novel and poetry writing bringing women writings and writers into prominence. According to Peter Barry the main postulates of feminist criticism are "rethinking the canon, aiming at the rediscovery of the texts written by women; examining representations of women in literature by men and women; examining power relations which obtain in texts and in life, with a view to breaking them down, seeing reading as a political act, and showing the extent of patriarchy; raising the question of whether man and women are 'essentially' different because of biology, or are socially constructed as different; exploring the question of whether there is a female language, an *écriture* feminine, and whether this is also available to men; questioning the popular notion of the death of the author. Asking whether there are only 'subject positions... constructed in discourse', or

whether, on the contrary, the experience (e.g. of a black or lesbian writer) is central; last, but not the least revaluing women's experience" (134).

In 1976, Annette Kolodny had added her observation that feminist literary criticism appeared "more like a set of interchangeable strategies than any coherent school or shared goal orientation" (Showalter 180). Feminist criticism focuses on "the woman as reader" and on "the woman as writer", the two concepts given by Elaine Showalter in her 1979 essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (Bertens 96). As a consequence of the conceptualisation of 'woman as reader' there arise many questions like what role have women been assigned in texts by men? What cultural context have they been placed in? What circumstance have they been put in and accordingly, what role has been assigned to them? Feminist critics showed how these representations reinforced the stereotypical images of women, images which Hans Bertens describes as: "an immortal and dangerous seductress, the woman as eternally dissatisfied shrew, the woman as cute but essentially helpless, the woman as unworldly, self-sacrificing angel" and so on (97). Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics* discusses and analyses in detail what stance do men writers have towards women in works by Henry Miller (1891-1980), D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and Norman Mailer (1923-2007), talks of the politics of power that is functional even in the private sphere. Millet defines 'political' as,

This essay does not define the political as that relatively narrow and exclusive world of meetings, chairmen, and parties. The term "politics" shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. By way of parenthesis one might add that although an ideal politics might simply be conceived of as the arrangement of human life on agreeable and rational principles from whence the entire notion of power over others should be banished, one must confess that this is not what constitutes the political as we know it, and it is to this that we must address ourselves. (23)

Quoting from Henry Miller's celebrated prose work *Sexus* describing a sexual activity, she as a reader focuses her attention on sentences like, "she was a monster from head to toe", "it happened so quickly she didn't have time to 'rebel' or even to pretend to 'rebel'", "Not a word spoken", bringing forth the idea of the exploitative

attitude of the male protagonist towards the female almost considered 'sub-human'. She responds as a feminist:

What the reader is vicariously experiencing at this juncture is a nearly supernatural sense of power - should the reader be a male. For the passage is not only a vivacious and imaginative use of circumstance, detail, and context to evoke the excitations of sexual intercourse, it is also a male assertion of dominance over a weak, compliant, and rather an unintelligent female. It is a case of sexual politics at the fundamental level of copulation. Several satisfactions for the hero and reader alike undoubtedly accrue upon this triumph of the male ego.... (Millet 6)

The private is 'political'. It is a matter of 'sexual politics' where power works even in the private. Hans Bertens discusses this saying, "Millet finds a relationship between sex and power in which the distribution of power over the male and female partners mirrors the distribution of power over males and females in society at large" (95). Feminist critics endeavour to put an end to the power structures that function in private and the public spheres by performing their roles as 'readers' and 'writers'.

The second concept in feminist literary criticism is of 'woman as writer' that was exemplified by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979). The focus of this concept is to have a "female tradition- or specifically female traditions- in writing by women" (Bertens 99). The world of literary writing was traditionally dominated by men. To Sandra and Susan when women began writing they suffered inhibitions and felt suffocated in the little space that was left for them for writing. Virginia Woolf in her essay *A Room of One's Own* propounds that even the language of writing was gendered. She further adds:

It was a thousand pities that the woman who could write like that, whose mind was tuned to nature and reflection, should have been forced to anger and bitterness. But how could she have helped herself? I asked, imagining the sneers and the laughter, the adulation of the toadies, the scepticism of the professional poet. She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write, and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps.... She 'must have', I say,

because when one comes to seek out the facts about Lady Winchilsea, one finds, as usual, that almost nothing is known about her. She suffered terribly from melancholy.... (57)

To Sandra and Susan this terrible situation of women was thus visible in writings by women exemplified by the title in their *Madwoman in the Attic*; referring to the wife of the employer Roger Rochester, namely Bartha, to be supposedly mad and locked up in the attic in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Thereby, developed a movement, to lay bare a female tradition of writing with its own style, themes (female sexuality, female anguish, child-birth), subject and a 'feminine' language which to feminists did not exist until then. According to Bertens:

Female literary studies focused on specifically female themes, genres, even styles, but also on the origins and development of large female traditions.... It has rediscovered forgotten female authors, has rehabilitated ignored ones, and has in its efforts to let women speak for themselves unearthed much writing of a personal nature.... (100)

Virginia Woolf applauds Emile Bronte and Jane Austen for writing as women write and not as men. She concedes that, "they alone were deaf to that persistent voice, now grumbling, now patronizing, now domineering, now grieved, now shocked, now angry, now avuncular, that voice which cannot let women alone, but must be at them, like some too-conscientious governess, adjuring them..." (Woolf 71). It was against the 'domineering', the 'angry' voice of the patriarchy that feminists took to writing. The concept of 'the personal is political' gained momentum with women writers frankly talking about their personal problems – writing about them, exploring them, holding patriarchy responsible for their bad condition. Carol Hanisch popularized the phrase 'the personal is political' with her essay entitled *Personal is Political* published in 1969 in an anthology *Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. A champion of the New York Radical Women she drew her ideas from Marxism and saw similarities between the oppressed female world and the oppressed working class suffering at the hands of capitalism. Taking it directly from the lines in *The Communist Manifesto* reading, "Workers of the world unite" and "The Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains", she wrote a paper in 1968 called "Women of the World Unite – We Have

Nothing to Lose But Our Men". Working for women's liberation many feminist critics drew on her idea of the 'personal is political', and discussed one of the most private institutes of a woman's life- the family, discussing what role has patriarchy decreed upon itself in the development of woman, how power structures function within the institution of a family, what place do women enjoy in this institution.

Family is a unique universal unit or institution of society. It is both private and public forming a buffer between the individual and the society. As Jaydipsinh K. Dodiya put it, "The family is a microcosm of a large culture. It is the foundation unit in any society that upholds its beliefs, customs and traditions" (2). Another scholar Joya Chakravarty has claimed in concern with writings of Shashi Deshpande:

...in novel after novel she knits her stories around the tangled lives of parents, children grand-children, aunts and uncles and everything else that illumines domesticity. In her novels she explores togetherness and separation, presence and absence, recurrence and reunion, in fact everything that is related to the psychodynamics of relationships. (298)

Society reflects in various forms of literature as literature can never be produced in a vacuum. Human being is a social animal and a work produced by him has a social relevance. It takes its matter from society and family being an indispensable unit, an institution of society has always been talked of and has formed an imperative establishment in works by writers.

In Hindi literature as well, family figures as an important patriarchal institution. In different genres- novel, short story, and play, etc. family has been depicted in different ways. Issues, conflicts and changes with changing times, socio-cultural transformations, they all show the effects on the different members of the family. Gender often plays a very important role in determining the fate of an individual in different circumstances. In the different eras of Hindi Literature different writers focus on the issues concerning women in their different ways. In the pre Prem Chand era works like *Priksha Guru* by Kishori Lal Goswami, *Bhagyawati* by Shradha Ram Filouri can be mentioned as the works depicting social issues. In the Prem Chand era with works like *Prem Ashram*, *Rang Bhumii*, *Nirmala*, *Godan* by Munshi Prem Chand realism came into prominence in the Hindi literature depicting real family issues. The third era of the post Prem Chand

saw works like *Jugalbandi* by Giri Raj Kishore, *Shekhar Ek Jawani* by Agyeya, *Sunita* by Jainendra, *Andhere Band Kamre* by Mohan Rakesh, *Mujhe Chand Chahiye* by Surendra Verma bringing to light the pre-independent and the post-independent era through the medium of family as a foundation in these works. Even in Indian English fiction family and the familial relationships surface in novels like *Small Remedies*, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande, *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, *Jasmine*, *Desirable Daughters* by Bharati Mukherjee, *Three Sisters*, *The Inner Door* by Nargis Dalal, *The Alien*, *The Young Couple* by Ruth Pawar Jhabwala, *God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy with Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri also finding themselves an esteemed place in the long list of such writers.

Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri are both significant contemporary women writers. Their work has been acclaimed both in critical as well as academic spheres. Both the writers write about the non-existence of freedom of educated women in a symbolic suggestive way and leave it out on the readers to draw their own conclusions. Both being women take up women issues book after book, their freedom, the constraints put by the society and themselves and their efforts to find themselves while whirling in the vortex of restraints put on them by the society, by the duties to be performed in the veneer of different roles they have to perform as daughters, wives, mothers and grandmothers. The present study is an attempt to compare Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri as feminist writers who react almost identically having been placed in different native contexts to woman's problems. The technique that both use as writers is different with one writing her best in a short story and the other in prose using almost similar themes with family forming an integral part of their works. The attempt of the writers to pen down the subjugation of women by the patriarchy, placed in a family and the so called extended family - the society places the two writers in the gamut of women's writing. Since Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri take up women of the present era as their subjects – mostly the ambitious, educated, working women in contemporary times it qualifies the two writers as subjects of contemporary study.

India has only recently witnessed the self-assertiveness of women in comparison to the West. But the grip of patriarchy in spite of its explicit lacunae's and shortcomings seems to be strengthening. The traditional attitude of Indian society towards women has

always been one of vacillation: oscillating between reverence and derision, individual and commodity, acceptance and contempt. On one hand woman is acclaimed as the Divine Mother and on the other is taken merely as an object of reproduction, gratification. The two writers take such women as their subjects who want to be the writers of their own destinies, in the institution of family, asserting their position in a society which is primarily patriarchal and supports patriarchy be it in any context- Indian or diasporic.

Manju Kapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar, a town in the northern Indian state of Punjab. After earning her B.A. from Delhi University, Kapur pursued her graduate work in English at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Rastogi 122). She currently is putting up in Delhi with her husband and four children, and is teaching English literature at Miranda House, a liberal arts and science college for women at Delhi University. A very articulate and a loquacious person Manju Kapur took to writing in her forties after the birth of her last child. Writing, according to an interview with Shubha Mishra, Urmila Dabir, Vandana Pathak etc., did not come to her that easily because she always believed herself to be an avid reader. But the desire to explore her life beyond the limits of “domesticity, teaching, children and preparing lectures” (Vandana 111), is what she thinks finally put her into the business. Taking P.D.James as her model who too started writing after she retired, Manju Kapur propounds that she thought of doing Ph.D. but for the “fear of exposing her ignorance” (qtd. in Vandana 113), lest she would be contradicted by some other writers, she dropped the idea and took to creative writing which according to her gives enough freedom to a writer not available to a researcher.

ManjuKapur has won many national and international accolades for her works which include: *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2009), *Custody* (2011). *Difficult Daughters* published by Penguin India, won the Best First Book Commonwealth Writers Prize for 1999. To Indira Gandhi in her book *Eternal India*:

Woman must be a bridge and a synthesizer. She shouldn't allow herself to be swept off her feet by superficial trends nor yet be chained to the familiar. She must ensure the continuity which strengthens roots and simultaneously engineer change and growth to keep society dynamic, abreast of knowledge, sensitive to

fast moving events, the solution lies neither in fighting for equal position nor denying it, neither in retreat into home nor escape from it. (qtd. in Prasad 312)

From women like Gargi and Anusua in scriptures, Razia Sultan to Jhansi Ki Rani in history, to women like Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das, Manju Kapur in the world of literature have left such indelible marks on the pages of history that cannot be buried under the irretrievable sands of time. Like Shakespeare they are 'not for an age but for all times'. Indian women novelists have tried to deal with the forsaken plight of women through their women characters in their works. They try to give voice to their women in the patriarchal society thus, bringing a message across the readers. But the writings of these women writers are not just limited to putting across the message, but like the *epic theatre* of Bertolt Brecht of the 1920s aims at evoking a critical distance and an attitude in the readers so as to arouse them to take action against rather than simply accept the plight and oppression of women by men.

Woman enjoys an important role in the Indo-Anglian fiction. The place of women has been christened in two varying types-the Sita type, who embodies the ideal of Indian womanhood, and the character of *Femme fatale* who threatens to ruin her lover and also disturb social peace. (Alam 65)

Manju Kapur explores both the types. Virmati's mother and Shagun's mother are Sita types but these are women of the first generation and women like Virmati, Ida, Shagun, Astha and Pipee are the *Femme Fatale* women of the second and the third generation who are courageous women who defy the norms set by their own mothers when need be. Drawing a parallel in her novels between the political scenario and the lives of her characters Kapur tries to bring forth the turbulence in their lives inside and outside. Rather, brings out the importance of the hard won freedom. Happiness comes with a price. Because what the women are essentially looking for is permanence and security, this is what they do not get and the novels do not end the way we expect them to. So, we have women betraying the husbands or not conforming to the societal norms rather than husbands performing infidelity. Kapur usually place women in family set ups where they have variegated roles to enact as women. They are usually educated

working women belonging to middle class society taking up issues which most women can reckon with and hence, associate themselves with.

In every fiction, there is some residue of truth, and in every truth there is a grain of fiction. (Rastogi 123)

It is the search of the 'self' that is seen in the works of Manju Kapur. Breaking free of the shackles of society, it is only identity of her characters that she is most concerned about, and the quest to lead their lives as they want to.

Jhumpa Lahiri, the second writer, in this study is a London born Indian American author who won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Her second work, a novel, *The Namesake* (2003), was adapted into a film in the year (2007). Lahiri's second collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), earned her a position at number one on *The New Times* best seller list. A Vice President of the PEN American Centre (2005), Lahiri is also a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (2010), appointed by the President Barack Obama. Wedded to Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush, a journalist who was then Deputy Editor of *TIME Latin America*, Lahiri is presently residing in Brooklyn, New York with her husband and two children. Amartya Sen in the *Argumentative Indian* poses:

As is frequently the case with immigrants in general, the Indian diaspora is also keen on taking pride- some self respect and dignity- in the culture and tradition of the original homeland. This frequently takes the form of some kind of 'national' or 'civilizational' appreciation of being Indian in origin. (qtd. in Sahu xxiv)

Indian diasporic writings since Independence have been appreciated on the global forum though with distinct themes yet a universal narrative of 'search for home'. Jhumpa Lahiri is one such diasporic woman writer who has been honoured not only at home but abroad also. Born to Bengali parents in 1967, London, Jhumpa took a devious road of becoming a writer. Her family immigrated to the United States where she grew up in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, where her father worked as a librarian and her mother taught Bengali at a university. She started writing at a tender age of seven, spoke frequent Bengali to her parents at home that made her stay in India easier where her parents took her and her sister for long vacations. She earned herself

a number of degrees. She received her B.A. from Barnard College and in the intertwining period between her graduation and her post graduation she worked as a research assistant at a non-profit institution in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Pursuing her M.F.A. degree at Boston University she obtained a double M.A. degree in English Literature and Comparative Studies in Literature and the Arts and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies at Boston University.

Lahiri like Manju Kapur deals with women from middle class who though are Bengali-Indians, yet there 'indianness' is never emphasized to put forth her point. Nonetheless, it is the dilemma of existence that they experience on a foreign land oscillating between two cultures- Indian and American.

Born to Indian parents and brought up largely in America, Lahiri negotiates the dilemmas of the cultural spaces lying across the continents with a master's touch. Though endowed with a distinct universal appeal, her stories do bring out rather successfully the predicament of the Indians who trapeze between and across two traditions, one inherited and left behind, and the other, encountered but not necessarily assimilated.... (Nayar, The Tribune)

Lahiri deals with themes of exile, difficult relationships, difficult marriages, displacement. She brings out the strangeness that seeps in relations in a family. One finds all relations discussed in her stories from father-daughter, mother-daughter, husband-wife, brother-sister, lovers. The first story in the collection entitled *Unaccustomed Earth* brings out the father-daughter relation and the strangeness that seeps in it which neither Ruma is able to understand nor is the writer able to put in words. Ruma is not able to share things with her father which she feels she could easily have with her mother. She feels the existence of her mother after she is dead more than she ever felt when she was alive. The story *Hell-Heaven* talks of the mother-daughter relation in which a daughter finds her mother inconsequential owing to the strong hold of the western culture. The stories *A Temporary Matter* and *A Choice of Accommodations* deal with the husband-wife relation and how love becomes a temporary emotion. *Only Goodness* brings out how a little pampering shown to youngsters by elders during childhood could lead to devastating consequences. Perhaps, she deals with all kinds of relations in a family and tries to trace the role of a woman amidst the inmates and how

relations change when placed in a different context affected with time by a different culture.

Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri are prominent writers of today dealing with issues most relevant in today's time quite apparent from the work conducted on both writers. Mayur Chhikara in her article *Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters: A Saga of Feminist Autonomy and Separate Identity*, has talked about the yearning for autonomy and identity in female protagonists who are caught in the conflict between society and the self. Declaring the novel *Difficult Daughters* a post-modern one the writer considers the protagonist as one caught between the sensual desires of the body and the intellectual movements of the society. Manju Roy in *Language and Style in Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters* deals with the sociolinguistics of Indian Writing in English in the novel and how the novelist's perfectionist attitude to the use of language in the novel lends it a stylistic charm. The usage of words like malai, ghee, lassi, shaan gives it a rich, homely family touch. In a Ph.D. thesis on *Women on the Margins: Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters* Christopher Rollason discusses to how the novel presents the fight of woman who desires to be free as against the backdrop of a pre-independent nation which also yearns for its freedom. With a traditionalist mother and a non-conventional father she aspires to be free. P. Sudha Shree in *Difficult Daughters: Travails in Self Identity* concerns herself with the conflict between self-identity and socio-cultural identity. The article traces women's needs as not to be relegated to the backdrop as a 'Karyeshu Daasi' and the need to be acknowledged in roles of mother, daughter and wife. In *Manju Kapur's 'Difficult Daughters': A Saga of Conflict and Crisis* Gajendra Kumar deliberates over how the story revolves around three generations of women- Ida, Virmati and Kasturi. It is the desire of mothers to have their daughters make right choices that are socially acceptable which lead to conflict between mothers and daughters. Sunita Sinha's *Discovery of Daring and Desire in Manju Kapur's Fiction* comments on the change in women's writings in present times with writer's describing in no uncertain terms the desires and feelings of their women protagonists focusing persistently on the identity crisis as is exemplified through Virmati. Dr. Ram Sharma, declaring Manju Kapur a feminist explores the male voice in his article *Representation*

of *Man in the Novels of Manju Kapoor*. He concedes that she gets a bit casual with her male characters presenting them only as they suit their female counterparts.

Jhumpa Lahiri too being an acclaimed writer has been popular in the world of research. With the publication of her first collection of short stories that bagged her Pulitzer Prize, she has ever since been a writer of interest to research scholars and readers. In *Meaningful Whispers: The Short Stories of Jhumpa Lahiri*, Mathur explores the cross fertilization of different cultures resultant of globalization as depicted in short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri through the Indian-American interaction. The writer treats the 'middle position' that characters experience on a foreign land. *Probing the Inner Self: Jhumpa Lahiri* by Saloni Prasad probes the inner self of immigrants who feel pulled in two different directions- one of the native land and that of family bonding. She also probes the inner psyche of Lahiri's characters and the emotional trauma that they experience as also how 'self' attains different definitions when defined by the context, the circumstances, the society and oneself. Arundhati Chatterjee in *The Migrant Voice of Jhumpa Lahiri* explores as to what goes into defining a migrant – stay on an alien land, the experience, expression or they all together. Nostalgia, or alienation are just one aspect of migration and it is the estrangement of bilingualism that prompts an immigrant writer to develop the kind of migrant idiom. Shalini Garg reviews it under the title *A Generation at Crossroads: A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's Unaccustomed Earth*. The article explores the "complicated intergenerational relationship's viewed from the migrant's perspective". How the bond between the parents and the children is always there without them being aware of it sometimes. The writer probes the theme through first two stories of the *Unaccustomed Earth*. Through Ruma and Usha portraying how the second generation is at crossroads imbibing the "cultural shock, segregation, nostalgia and alienation in the foreign land" from their parents and somewhere inside still rooted to their traditions to accept the West. The article *The Dwindling Presence of Indian Culture and Values in Jhumpa Lahiri's Unaccustomed Earth* by Aitor Ibarola reveals that though the second generation immigrants adapt themselves to foreign culture, language and behavioural patterns yet it would be unfair to ascertain that all are intent to discard their cultural heritage as is exemplified in characters like Ruma and Sudha. Other works conducted on Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* have been

under the titles *Cross-cultural Differences and Cross-border Relationships in Jhumpa Lahiri's Unaccustomed Earth* by Subhashree Mukherjee, *Short Stories of Cultural Mix and Clash* by Aju Mukhopadhyay, *Diasporic Indian Women in Jhumpa Lahiri's Unaccustomed Earth* by Tanushree Singh, and *The Language of Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's Unaccustomed Earth* by Brittany Kemper.

Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri are contemporary writers. Both are award winning writers but they started writing only a decade or so ago. However, since the first publications in 1998 and 1999, their work has been of constant interest for general public as well as academic researchers. Not much critical material is available on both the writers but for a few recent book-length studies, articles and reviews in magazines and journals. In both writers family forms an important unit. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* is tagged 'difficult' by the family as she refuses to be bogged down by the family traditions set by the patriarchy. *Unaccustomed Earth* deals with the complications arising in the family relations when individuals are placed in a different cultural context. The stories deal with the conflict between first-generation and second-generation immigrants. Family, thereby, forms an integral issue in both the writers. This dissertation would aim to study the two narratives from the perspective of their critiquing family as a unit. It is an aspect which is significant in the works of both these writers but has not been studied in detail so far.

The first chapter deals with the theory of feminist criticism as to how feminists have been endeavouring to combat negative representations by men in literature and the concepts of women as readers and writers. The second and the third chapters deal with the dilemmas of women of middle class as presented by Kapur and Lahiri in their works with one taking a 'feminist' stance carving out space for woman in family and society and the other a 'feminine' one bringing forth the strangeness in relations owing to an oscillation between the accustomed culture and the unaccustomed earth. The last chapter sums up the study by deliberating on what place do women enjoy in a family as portrayed by these two writers.

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CHAPTER 2

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*: In Search of Space

I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom. (Fanon 180)

Some questions, some desires can never retreat into “the lightless crevices of memory” (Divakaruni 147), or of time. No matter how far the current of history drags one headlong, there is bound to be a resting place. After countless years of painstakingly absorbing struggle, have women found that Utopian world, yet needs to be seen. Where to Fanon like most post colonial writers literature writing meant creating a space for, “the man of color”, who “was enslaved” (Fanon 180) and inhumanely killed by the white man intellectually; to most feminist writers literature writing goes beyond the confines of a page into the real world with the motive of bringing a change in society with women not leading a non-existent life but a life scripted by their own pens.

Manju Kapur, in her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, introduces Virmati, the protagonist who claims to walk the path scripted by her own self, a journey which turns quite promising for her. Talking of a woman character in a joint family she shows how a daughter is christened *difficult* by the family and the society when she decides to defy norms set by society for women. Virmati, Kasturi's daughter is difficult as she is in search of her own space and identity; Ida- Virmati's daughter is no less difficult as she tries to escape stereotypical notions that her mother wants her to imbibe. In writing this book, Kapur took eight years and eight rejections, to which she adds, “with every rejection I shortened, tightened, compressed, focused my writing” (Pathak 112), reinforcing Elaine Showalter's idea in her essay “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”, that “...the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing or even attacking male critical theory” (183). About the book she adds: “Nothing is planned in a big way, but eventually things may take a grand shape. Writing this novel was not very difficult for me, but it took eight long years before the book finally saw the light of the day” (Prasad 329).

Manju Kapur with her five novels has come to be hailed as the chronicler of modern Indian family in the modern society with family as the primal set up championing

the cause of women. Jai Arjun Singh, in Business Standard was quoted saying that Kapur writes high quality fiction and understands the inconstancy of human beings and their relationships; of their self-delusions and manipulations of situations to suit their own viewpoints and how the joint family system provides the perfect setting for playing out of all these qualities.

Difficult Daughters, pays a tribute to the most beautiful bond of a mother-daughter relationship where a daughter goes out in search of a much deserved identity of her now dead mother. The dedication of the novel, “to my mother and her mother and my father” accentuates this “woman-to-woman” (Rastogi122), bonding which also forms the central theme of the novel. The semi-autobiographical novel seems to be written with all ease and effortless ingenuity which comes to her as spontaneously as nature poetry to Wordsworth or prose writing depicting industrialization to Dickens. There is not much play on words. The first sentence of the novel opens:

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. (Kapur, *Daughters 2*)

In a prosaic way the reader is conveyed of the loud disturbance between the daughter and the mother even when she is dead. Lack of artifice and colloquial touch which are just not the features of Indian writing in English characterize Kapur’s writings. The precision with which she writes is her forte giving even the minutest details of the sometimes unfelt emotions. The women that she usually takes up as her characters are the ones who have dared to either defy the norms of the society or are survivors who with all the adjectives, *gandi*, *badmaash*, *wicked* given to women try to live their lives- Virmati has an illicit affair with a married professor from Oxford, has a child from him, and gets the child aborted with no one from her family around, is disparaged by her in-laws; Ida is a divorcee, a childless and a parentless daughter who becomes the mouthpiece for the writer and instead of assembling her life together she wants to resurrect her mother’s marriage and her identity. “ Descriptions of ‘Oriental’ women as prisoners of the harem, suffocated by religious custom and at the mercy of brutish husbands” (Burton 63), is what Indian Women Writers took to writing against in their

works dismantling the descriptions about women by men which with time had come to be taken as real. Representations about women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Indian writers particularly male were for the most part as suffering, docile, subservient and petite women with a voiceless existence happy in their lot. As Burton observes, "Feminist writers who constructed arguments about the need for female emancipation built them around the specter of a passive and enslaved Indian womanhood" (63). The passivity and the enslavement of women could be seen more vigorously in works by male writers. To quote some writers one could think of Rabindranath Tagore, who portrays a cravenly submissive woman in *Ashalatta* shown as a devoted Indian wife ignorant of his husband Mahendra's extra marital affair with Binodini the protagonist of the novel, or Maithilisharan Gupt, the National poet in Hindi, who propagates the same idea in his poetry by saying,

Abla jivan haye tumhari yahi kahani,
anchal main hai dudh or aankhon main pani (transliteration) (qtd. in Thorat)

Or when Mulk Raj Anand, one of the three stalwarts of Indian English Fiction propounds the image of woman as an exploitative sub-human category in the male chauvinistic society in his novels and short stories, portraying one side of woman- that of a vulnerable 'Sati-Savitri, all forgiving' image most represented in the Indian scriptures. "Delineation of women in India is displayed by Mulk Raj Anand" (Thorat 1), in the short story *Lajwanti*, where the predicament of the Indian woman is exemplified through a detained bird in a cage. *Lajwanti* is the story of a village girl whose, brother-in-law makes advances towards her while her husband is away at college. All her attempts to evade him go useless and eventually she tries to submerge herself, but as luck would have it, she is saved. Her condition is brought forth in lines like, "My maina tell me what will happen? And I do not know if Jaswant will relent and not pursue me anymore. But perhaps that my father has brought me back, I will allow myself to be eaten" (qtd. in Thorat 1). *Lajwanti* gets help from nowhere. Her mother-in-law becomes ignorant of her son's advances knowingly; her parents take it as a condemnable act to return back to a father's house after getting married. Her father while returning his daughter says, "Kill her if you like. But don't let her come to me without the lap full of son. I shall not be above to survive the disgrace if she comes again" (qtd.in Thorat 1). Stories like *Lullaby*,

Birth, The Silver Bangles bring out the prime concern of the writer who brings out the characteristic of the “Indian milieu and ethos” (Thorat 1), through the women in his stories. Anand in his book, *The Bride’s Book of Beauty* confesses,

Obviously, woman in India has sometimes been exalted as a goddess, but mostly pampered as a doll or kept down and oppressed..... The Indian woman nearly drifted along and became bound to man, more and more as a slave, less and less as an individual apart”. (qtd. in Thorat 2)

Another imminent writer Raja Rao in his seminal work *Kanthapura*, has Rangamma and Ratna who emerge as “new women who defy conventions and lead the war of independence” (Tara’s). But these women figure at the front because they do not have to shoulder responsibilities of a husband or a child. Yet, even these women do not go far beyond the feminine boundaries. Nonetheless, male writers have also given a powerful voice to females in their works like M. R. Anand’s *Gauri*, R. K. Narayan’s *The Dark Room*, Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*. Be it women in works like *Binodini* and *Kanthapura* or women in works like *The Dark Room* or *Gauri*, it is always the extreme sides of women that one comes across with i.e. either as a ‘Sati-Savitri’ image or that of a complete ‘rebel’ in male writings. The grey shades of a woman’s life are seldom visible in a male writer.

But with Feminist critics highlighting the shift in concern from androcentric representations to gynocentric, there came a change in the representations of women characters with women writers like Anita Desai, Ashapura Devi, Ismat Chughtai, Ambai and Vaidehi, Kamala Markandaya who with their staunch feminist ideologies tried to emancipate women from the patriarchal ties which they thought played a role “in aiding or obstructing feminist freedom” (Ghosh 21). Elaine Showalter propagates the notion

I do not think that feminist criticism can find a useful past in the androcentric critical tradition. It has more to learn from women’s studies.... It must find its own subject, its own system, its own theory and its own voice. (184)

Voice thereby was provided to women by these writers who present their women as rebels made aware of their existence and rights through education as education of women is important to these writers, women who fight patriarchal ideologies, as Anita Ghosh rightly puts, “in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms,

regardless of the consequence that such a rebellion may have on their lives” (22). Writers like Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Sarojini Sahoo, Manju Kapur to name a few, with their frank and insurgent writings have emerged creating a new trend in fiction writing with women characters being more defiant, headstrong, recalcitrant of the patriarchal set up. The New Indian Express, on December 21, 2000, in regards with Sarojini Sahoo, was quoted saying:

You may call her creativity controversial and term her unconventional frankness as feminist but you can never afford to ignore this woman and writer of courage and conviction. Sarojini Sahoo is a noted short story writer of India and known for her brilliant boldness. (Sahoo, *The New Indian Express*)

Voice was not only given to women through fiction, but feminist writings found a space in newspaper columns, journals, magazines in India and abroad as well creating its own “subject”, its own “theory” (Showalter 184). *Manushi* saw the light of day in 1978, *Kali for Women* brought out its first publication in July 1984, *Legacy*, an official journal for the study of American Women Writers focuses on American women’s writings, *JoTWW- Journal of Texas Women Writers* is dedicated to Texas women’s writings. The inaugural editorial of *Manushi* reads, “*Manushi* is a journal about women, by women – an attempt to talk to each other about what we feel but never say – an attempt to understand our predicament collectively as women in this society, every aspect of which is heavily weighed against women” (qtd. in Singh 36). The editors Kishwar and Vanita also set the target of the paper vividly articulating,

Let us re-examine the whole question. Let us take nothing for granted. Let us not only re-define ourselves, our role, our image- but also the kind of society we want to live in. (qtd. in Singh 36)

Manju Kapur “re-examines”, “re-defines” the whole question about the identity of women with her women characters like Ida- the independent, Virmati- the rebellious and Shakuntla- the revolutionary in the novel. While Alice Walker paraphrases Okot p’Bitek’s poem

O, my clanswomen
Let us all cry together!
Come,

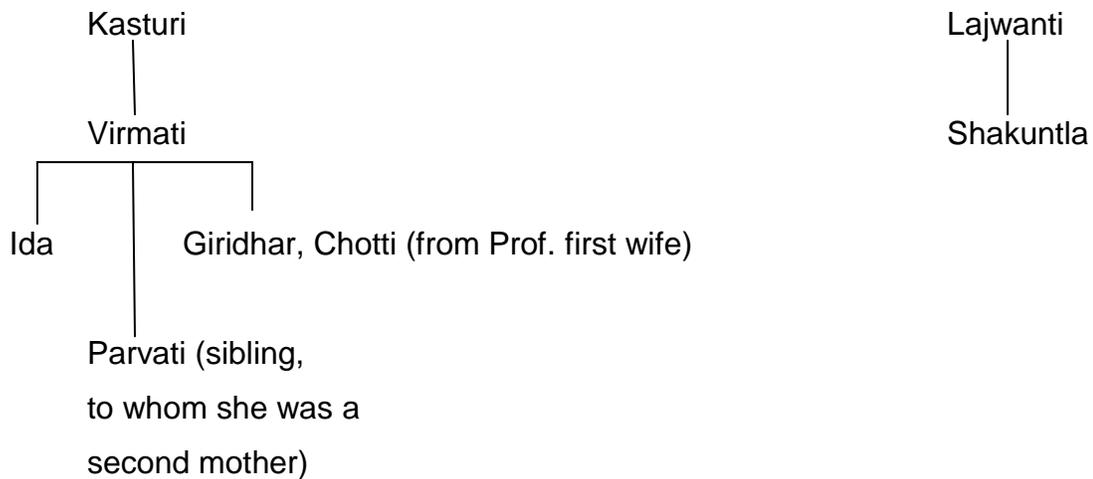
Let us mourn the death of our mother,
The death of a Queen
The ash that was produced
By a great fire!
O, this homestead is utterly dead
Close the gates
With *lacari* thorns,
For our mother
The creator of the Stool is lost!
And all the young women
Have perished in the wilderness!

(qtd. in Walker 234)

Further, she smoothly voices that, no, this is not the end of the story. That, not all young women are dead. Not all have perished in the wilderness. Ida proves to be one of them. Ida, in the opening chapter, stands numb against the pyre of her dead mother. She stands there emotionless, staring at the pile of her mother's ashes while her relatives stand "tear-stricken" (Kapur, *Daughters* 1), wondering what memorial could she give her mother, one way through which she could make the world remember her and her sacrifices after she were dead, something which people did not acknowledge while she still breathed, a woman fighting for another woman! If silence were words for once, then it is just one moment of a silent gesture that she is looking for that could make her mother live even when dead - an epitaph, an inscription on a concrete slab, or a never-ending moment with her standing in front of her mother's ashes engulfed into that very moment. Dora Sales in an essay on the novel in English comments:

In *Difficult Daughters* we do not listen to Virmati's voice. She could not speak out, being certainly situated at the juncture of two oppressions: colonialism and patriarchy. What we have is her daughter's reconstruction and representation.
(qtd. in Chikarra 193)

The mothers and daughters in the novel could be represented thus:



The story revolves around the life of Virmati against a political backdrop of pre-independence India. Virmati, Ida's mother, is born in Amritsar into an affluent and high-minded household to Kasturi and Suraj Prakash. She is the eldest of eleven children which her mother bore one after another. She has a busy schedule as she has all the responsibility of looking after her siblings and thereby is not able to perform well in her exams. She flunks. She falls in love with a Professor who stays as a lodger in her house. They both develop an intimate relation. On the other hand she is engaged to Inderjeet, an engineer by profession with whom her marriage gets postponed because of a death in his family. During this time she passes her FA exam and decides not to marry. On being forced by the family she tries to commit suicide at Tarsikka by drowning herself. She is rescued by the servants of her grandfather, Lala Divan Chand and is brought back to Lepel Griffin Road. On being enquired for the reason for suicide she declares that she wants to study further and does not want to marry. Thereby, marriage is settled with Indumati, the second daughter. The scene here from shifts to Lahore where she goes for further studies.

Virmtai's reluctance in marrying Inderjeet becomes a reason of discord between the mother and the daughter. Marriage in Indian society is an old and a compulsory tradition. It is a sacred ritual that is performed with a man and a woman getting tied into the social institution of marriage shouldering social responsibilities. But Virmati's desire to get educated and Kasturi's demand to have her daughter settled into this institution creates problems between the two. Thus, in the first few chapters of the novel one gets

to know of the difficult relations that Virmati shares with her mother and the difficult times that she has to endure at the behest of her mother and her family. Adrienne Rich in her work, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* writes,

The cathexis between mother and daughter- essential, distorted, misused- is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. (qtd. in Hirsch 200)

Where Adrienne Rich, “alerted us to the silence that has surrounded the most formative relationship in the life of every woman, the relationship between daughter and mother” (Hirsch 200), Manju Kapur through her novels like *Difficult Daughters*, *home and Custody* has reinforced Rich’s claim. The gap between the mother and a daughter widens because mothers sometimes are not able to understand their daughters and daughters in return do not want to understand their mothers. What Virmati experienced as a girl and as an adolescent, her daughter Ida’s fate was no less different in the story *Difficult Daughters*. Her novels open up doors to the world where we see women either connecting or resisting other women. The male characters in the novel do not have an integral role to play, where males are not vividly described or lend a voice. Nonetheless, women become representatives of patriarchy in her novels.

Virmati lived as a second mother to her siblings looking after their minutest needs as her mother was always sick, “Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache. Her back curved in towards the base of her spine, and carrying her children was a strain, even when they were young” (Kapur, *Daughters* 7). The hillside house where Virmati and Kasturi were sent for a few days could do nothing to lessen the gap between the two where both were just themselves. The beautiful mountains, the pointed roof, a grand view of the valley in front, deodar trees, fragrant gardens, “pink hydrangea bushes down the path leading to the front door” (Kapur, *Daughters* 11), could not beautify their relation. Virmati has got conditioned to the way that she could not think of herself above her duties, “Virmati quickly settled into housekeeping for her mother” (Kapur, *Daughters* 11). The uneasiness that she feels amidst her family is quite visible in the line, “she had never

had Kasturi so much to herself, and was jealous of each moment with her” (Kapur, *Daughters* 11). Perhaps this is something that she could never tell her mother. There is never the love- the unconditional love that is very specific of mothers. All that she wants is her due as a daughter and not just a responsible sister who would look after the tiniest needs of her siblings from their food to milk, clothes, studies, bathing, bandaging etc. The only duty that she finds herself not performing as an eldest sister is not breast feeding them.

At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special.

However, when she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother’s arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. ‘Have you seen to their food – milk – clothes – studies?’ (Kapur, *Daughters* 6).

For once Virmati yearns to be loved not as a daughter who is loved only for she shoulders responsibilities too well, but for what she is- Virmati, “At other times Virmati’s attempts to spin webs of love through her devotion were not met by exasperation. Kasturi was not used to so much solicitude” (Kapur, *Daughters* 11).

The rebellion is the more violent when, as often happens, the mother has lost her prestige. She is the one who waits, submits, complains, weeps, makes scenes: an ungrateful role that in daily life leads to no apotheosis; as a victim she is looked down on; as a shrew, detested; her fate seems the prototype of rapid recurrence: life only repeats itself in her, without going anywhere; firmly set in her role as housekeeper, she puts a stop to the expansion of existence, she becomes obstacle and negation. Her daughter wishes not to be like her, worshipping women who have escaped from feminine servitude: actresses, writers, teachers, she engages avidly in sports and in study, she climbs trees, tears her clothes, tries to rival the boys. (Beauvoir 298).

What Simone writes of a mother - daughter relation in general aptly befits the relation between Virmati and Kasturi. Virmati becomes rebellious from the start owing to the practice of her mother of bearing children. The patriarchy in the house – Kasturi’s husband and father-in-law want the house to be filled with resonance of children as Kapur tells us, “she had filled the house as her in-laws had wanted” (Kapur, *Daughters* 7). As the grandfather would often remark, “Raunaq in the house at last” (Kapur,

Daughters 25). Her body had been converted into a child-bearing machine by the patriarchy so much so that with time Kasturi herself becomes the mouthpiece of patriarchy, voicing to her daughter time and again the essential roles of a woman - settling down as soon as it could be and to carry off the lineage of bearing children like her. Virmati comes to hate her mother for this perhaps! Manju Kapur takes a feminist stance here by showing how a woman's body is merely taken as a mechanical object- a child-bearing machine.

To every daughter mother is usually held in high esteem but for Virmati things take a turn. Mother's constitute the entire world for daughters. "Motherhood is the greatest joy in the world. It is an instinct every woman cherishes" (Kurjekar 227). It is them, who they can confide in and turn back to. But every time Virmati tries doing it, she is admonished. Duties never leave her. She never could live enjoying the world and its beauty around her because she never had time. This suffocation which Virmati could never voice makes her rebellious and makes her hate her mother. Just like Virmati, Nisha too, the third-generation daughter in *home* by Manju Kapur, does not have a fulfilling upbringing. She too is not too fond of her mother Sona and would be reminiscent of the time spent at her aunt's place. It is her aunt's culinary skills that she misses on the dining table, the quietness of the house that she longs for, "when she came home from school she missed the fuss, when she worked she missed the encouragement" (Kapur, *Home* 128). Nisha is not happy in her home. There is something that she misses which everyone around her seems to be oblivious to.

Worst of all, no one imagined there any lack in her life that needed to be filled....

It led to endless fulmination, complaint, and comparisons between her present self and some ideal daughter. (Kapur, *Home* 128)

What defines an ideal daughter? Probably somebody who completely dedicates her life to the well being of her family- parents, husband, children, in-laws; serving them, devoting herself, taking in their platitudes passively. In a patriarchal set-up of family different roles are assigned to a girl as a daughter, a wife, a mother, an aunt, and a mother-in-law. The first generation women fulfilled these roles- Kasturi, Lajwanti, Sona (*Home*), Sunita (*Home*), the grandmother in the novel (*Home*), Mrs Sabharwal (*Custody*), but the second generation women like Virmati, Nisha, Shakuntla, Swarna

Lata are not willing to accept their mother's lot as their fate as well. They strive to be different. They become rebellious. Nisha does not hesitate answering back the questions put up by her family about Suresh:

'Who is he?' she (Rupa – her aunt) asked valiantly.

'He's going to see Papaji in the shop on Tuesday'.

'Alone? How could Nisha be so naïve? ...'

'How does it matter? It is him I want to marry, not his family'.

'Have you met his family? What do they do?'

'Shop owners. Like us.'

'Where?'

'Kashmiri Gate'.

'Caste?'

'I don't know'.

'He hasn't told you?'

'Of Course he has. He tells me everything, but I do not have to remember, do I?' ... (Kapur, *Home* 196)

What makes Nisha so rebellious is the negligence with which she has been brought up which, unlike Kasturi, Sona is aware of. "Sona was making for negligent upbringing. Nisha needed to be grounded in the tradition that would make her a wife worth having" (Kapur, *Home* 128). Neither does the beautiful Shagun in *Custody* when she discloses her extra-marital affair to her mother:

'You always take his side.'

'You never said that was a problem'.

'I was so young, what did I know?'

'You were of marriageable age, twenty-one, same as me.'

'Have you come all the way to tell me this?' (Kapur, *Custody* 39)

What makes Virmati rebellious against her family is the frustration that gnaws on her inside, the strange lull that she feels growing between the modern daughter and the traditional mother owing to the intellectual gap and the emotional quotient between the mother and the daughter not really existing. Anuradha Verma propounds that in today's time we are dealing with a new concept which she calls the by-product of feminism, i.e.

'a new woman'. Quoting Sharad Srivastva from his book *The New Woman in Indian English Fiction*, Verma states:

A new woman is 'new' if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her own rights as a woman and as an equal being. (51)

Virmati wants to "assert her own personality", a quality that Srivastava propounds in a 'new woman'. But how well is this 'new woman' supported? To what extent will she be accepted in the patriarchal society? Would the women's world be open to such women who propose to go one step ahead of them? Does assertion of women do them any good? Does it lead them to happiness? Answers to these questions seem uncertain when one sees the plight of the protagonist in the novel *Difficult Daughters*. A woman's greatest strength is her family. And, in the family it is the mother who has the most important role to play in a woman's life. A mother herself being a woman can foresee things which her child cannot. As Aasmaani says in Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses*, "My mother who left fourteen years ago, who used to leave so often before that, only my mother has power in my life. You're the one who's always been my rock, you and Beema together, the anchors who keep me marooned to sanity" (qtd. in Pathak 238). In this line one gets a glimpse of an 'elementary' family and an extended family as well. A.M.Shah defines 'elementary family' as "a group composed of a man, his wife and their children.... the members of an elementary family always live together in the same household, either by themselves or as part of a wider household group such as a joint or extended family" (15). The mother in this novel, Samani Akram walks out of her marriage and her home disappearing altogether for about fourteen years, after the death of his beloved revolutionary poet, leaving her daughter Aasmaani behind. Her father remarries and establishes a new family with Beema survived by his second daughter Rabia from Beema. The step mother and the half-sister as we get to know from the lines do have a role to play in Aasmaani's life. Family is integral to the girl as it provides her with emotional security. But, one also figures out how important the mother is, even when she has not seen her since the past fourteen years. It is the mother that she still feels has a 'power' in her life. The extended family – Beema and Rabia too share a place but even they cannot replace her mother. Virmati's mother was not away

from her physically but at the emotional level she seemed too far. The distance between them seemed to be increasing with each new day, each new development in the house, each new conversation. Even the big family could not come to her rescue when she most needed them.

Another troubled mother-daughter relation in the novel is that of Lajwanti- the aunt-in-law, and Shakuntla her daughter. Shakuntla, like Virmati, embarked on a journey of establishing herself but unlike Virmati she comes out victorious. To her mother's inquisitiveness she would firmly retort, "Another word about shaadi... and I'm going back to Lahore" (Kapur, *Daughters* 16).

Not only mother-daughter but also one gets a glimpse of a father-son relationship in the novel. Nowhere in the novel has the writer explicitly used the compound term mother-daughter while talking about Kasturi and Virmati but she does use the term father-son in the literal sense thus, exploring another relation. December, 1940 - the year of nationalistic movements all over Lahore for ousting Britishers. That very year, Roerich Exhibition was the major event in the city inaugurated by Sir Douglas Young, the Chief Justice of Punjab, specially attended by the premier of Punjab, Sir Sikander Hyatt Khan, providing a forum for the mingling of Indian and British celebrities.

The exhibition, in a wing of the Lahore Museum, was a father-son affair, with both Professor Roerich and his son Svetoslav displaying paintings on opposite walls. Comparisons, contrasts, and an occasion for a wealth of commentary by art lovers. (Kapur, *Daughters* 129)

The father-son relation is also visible between Lala Diwan Chand and his two sons Chander Prakash and Suraj Prakash. Lala Diwan Chand loved his sons and could go to any extent to see his sons and their families happy. Lala Diwan Chand had a high name in society and did not want to deprive his family of anything. The growing number of children in the family did not make him evade his responsibilities.

Lala Diwan Chand loved Tarsikka...and as his grandchildren grew, he kept adding to the place. They needed fresh fruit and vegetables which his six-acre garden would provide. He planted trees of mango, mausambhi, cheekoo, jamun, pear, pomegranate, lemon, papaya, malta, loquat, lichi, and mulberry. In winter there were rows of seasonal vegetables. To house his frequently visiting

grandchildren, he built a block of large rooms boarded by a wide veranda in the middle of the garden. (Kapur, *Daughters* 71)

Apart from providing his grandchildren with the basic necessities he is the only one in the big family who supports education. He loves Virmati more than any of his granddaughters. But as everything that starts does come to an end, so do love and happiness in the family that already exist at the superficial level. As Tulsi Patel puts it in the introduction to *The Family in India*, “The family is an institution that simultaneously envelops and unfolds the ideal and normative on the one hand and actual behavior on the other. It works as a conduit, and sanctions and provides the potential for continuity as well as change in structures of kinship, marriage and reorganization of living arrangements in accordance with the times” (31). The growing number of the family brought a change in the living conditions of the members with property getting divided and the two families dwelling in two different households. It is during the issue of separation that is brought up by Chander Prakash that we get to see the love of a son for the father. A heated argument takes place between Lala Diwan Chand and Chander Prakash.

Chander: Baoji, they are eleven, and we are two. How will everything be equal-equal? With two houses....

Lala Diwan Chand: Beta, since when have everybody’s needs not been met equally? We do not consider what we can get, but what we need. Have you or your family ever wanted for anything under my roof?’

Chander: But after you, Baoji.... (persisted Chander Prakash) (Kapur, *Daughters* 29)

Lala Diwan Chand is dumbstruck, a son going too far to talk of his father’s death in such an “inauspicious manner” (Kapur, *Daughters* 29) to his face being blinded by the delusion of property so much as to talk to a loving father in this insensible manner. But things had gone too far. He needed a separate house for his two children so that they would have no problem establishing their families. A son thinking of his son above his father perhaps! Lala Diwan Chand, a pragmatic man, did argue further saying, “We are teaching them to do that now... if we cannot live together, how can we expect the younger ones to do so?” (Kapur, *Daughters* 29). But, nothing could stop Chander. The

arrow had been shot from the bow. No matter how hard it hit the target it definitely did pierce Lala Diwan Chand's heart. If mothers constitute the entire world for daughters, then fathers too constitute the world for sons. With the passage of time and change in circumstances there also occur variations in the relationships among people in a joint family and Kapur diligently explores this relationship bringing out the fact that how things take a turn in a joint family disintegrating it into nuclear ones owing to the avidness of the members and a growing sense of responsibility that they feel towards their immediate family. A.M.Shah propagates,

A major problem for everyone in a large and complex household of parents and two or more married sons is to maintain harmony between the expectations of the multiplicity of roles that one has to perform in such a household. (qtd. in Patel 219)

Manju Kapur like other novelists namely Anita Desai, Kamala Markandya, Kamila Shmasie, Arundhati Roy talks about different relationships ranging from mother daughter, between siblings, casual acquaintances, that of lovers, of husband and wife, and relation of people within a joint family. One also sees the relation that women in a joint family share. Lala Diwan Chand with a sister and two sons has a successful jewellery business. They have a house wherein the members live with all the emotions and feelings that are quiet typical of human beings in a joint family. Kapur realistically portrays the same without even an ounce of faltering in her depiction. She minces no words in bringing out the uneasiness that starts growing in Lajwanti's, the elder daughter-in-law's heart over the homage that every family member seems to be paying to the younger daughter-in-law unlike her. Her mind is always occupied by thoughts of how the whole family seems taken over by Kasturi's ill health after the birth of the last child. "She had never seen anybody fussed over as much as that woman. She, too, had been sick after her miscarriages. Had the family offered her to send her to the mountains? To her mother's? Anywhere?" (Kapur, *Daughters* 12). Male voice in *Difficult Daughters* is not too loud or audible. It is the female voice which either becomes the mouthpiece of patriarchy or instigates it into action. It is Lajwanti who foresees the miserable consequences of the exponential proliferation in the size of the family. Her incessant platitudes to her husband like,

In fixing his wife's health he will ruin his own. All the burden of running the shop falls on you while he is away, but you are a saint and will never say anything about your own condition. Where do we, and our two children, stand in front of that woman, and her eleven children? (Kapur, *Daughters* 12)

Baoji, the noise. From morning to night I have a headache. Somnath has been forced to go to the storeroom on the kotha to study, and as for Shaku, how is it possible for her to concentrate on her books with all their hoo-hoo, haa-haa, hee-hee? (Kapur, *Daughters* 25)

How hard you have to work! And for whom? Those children! Ha!...Our children! Now it is all very well, but will they ask after us in our old age!... *Arre*, what is here is all right, but they go on coming. Every one or two years. It is like a harvest!... *Bap re*, you are too good-natured. At least we cannot keep watching our money go into their mouths! (Kapur, *Daughters* 26)

make her win the battle. And Chander Prakash begins seeing things in the right perspective. Such conversations become an everyday affair in the elder brother's life. He finally thinks of taking a retirement and conveys this to his father Lala Diwan Chand who is perplexed on hearing this. Having worked all through his life to see himself and his business grow as traders, the family head is just not ready to divide the property into halves or quarters. Unfortunately, "what he thought was a final solution, however, turned out to be the beginning of a long chain of partitions" (Kapur, *Daughters* 27). Co-operation and responsibility are the two pillars on which the togetherness of a family rests. But Diwan Chand's family eventually loses both these and consequently the large orchards on the outskirts of Amritsar are divided, the house partitioned and another house which could accommodate Chander Prakash and his family is started to be built. A partition in the house set against the backdrop of partition of the country. A partition in the hearts creating distances against the backdrop of partition of land geographically! A. M. Shah propounds

Birth, marriage and death are occasions for public expression of many and mixed emotions and sentiments. Some of this emotion is even planned and orchestrated. The emotions involved in the process of separation or partition, on

the other hand, are usually not so publicly and symbolically expressed, and are on that account more challenging.... (qtd. in Patel 216)

In Indian Hindu culture since ancient times there are sixteen rituals which range from before the birth of a child till after death. The occasions of birth, marriage and death act as catalyst to let out the emotions of people involved, whereas, the process of partition and separation is one which mostly people are reluctant about sharing lest it would have a whole gamut of demeaning talks erupting from the society and people around. The partition of the family is a personal affair but there are moments when one gets to know of Lajwanti's emotions. How much she misses the chatter of kids, the noise and the liveliness in the four surroundings of the wall. The writer substantiates this through the lines, "Of course, she missed her nieces and nephews terribly, but Fate was always cruel to her, what could she do? That is why she took the tonga out every evening and went over to visit them in Lepel Griffin Road" (Kapur, *Daughters* 31). But throwing spasmodic visits to the relatives do not change things in a big way. The distance that has occurred between them could not be reduced by any means. The joint family has disintegrated into a nuclear family. The family, eventually, that Virmati could look up to is never there for her neither when they were together nor when they separate. There is a loneliness that she feels amidst the crowd of her family. Thanks to the indifferences that they all share! Virmati never has someone intimate with whom she could share her most intimate emotions, neither at her mother's house nor in-laws.

Family forms the basic unit of any society. Where on one hand, every society has certain norms there on the other, for every family to be able to function properly it needs to follow those norms. Professor and Virmati defy these norms of family and society and are made to endure repercussions. After her family gets to know of her affair with the professor they lock her up in a storeroom. Instead of trying to talk her out of the situation the family resorts to locking her up where for Virmati, "Time stands still in this large, dark room.... When it rains I sit next to the small window, usually on a bin of rice. Sometimes the breeze blows a few welcome drops on my face. Long ago I used to dance and run in the rain when nobody was looking. Now I pine for drops" (Kapur, *Daughters* 88). When Virginia Woolf was prohibited from entering the university library she recalled in her essay *A Room of One's Own* that, "it is unpleasant to be locked

out... it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in” (qtd. in Showalter 181). It is in the storeroom that Virmati finds ‘a room of her own’ where she could just be herself. The storeroom provides her the space that she urges for. Ironically, where Virginia Woolf finds it ‘worse’ to be locked in, there Virmati finds it ‘liberating’. Except for Parvati, the youngest of the lot, who comes as an angel to Virmati, there is no one who comes to her rescue. Parvati to whom Virmati has always been indispensable, doesn’t fear putting herself in trouble for her sister’s sake and helps her write letters to her beloved by providing her with material as and when needed. Seclusion amidst the crowd becomes Virmati’s fate – be it in Amritsar or Lahore or her in-law’s house.

Education plays an important role in shaping Virmati’s life. It is her desire for higher studies that moulds her life throughout the novel. The reluctance of the family towards her desire can be seen from the fact it is in beginning of the novel that Virmati for the first time voices her desire of going to Lahore for higher studies- a desire that completely perplexes the mother so much so that she bangs Virmati’s head in the wall so as to knock some sense into it. Lahore, which is the hub of all major activities, which makes Shakuntla- her cousin taste the “...wine of freedom.... Wine, whereas all Virmati had ever drunk had been creamy milk in winter... and frothy cool lassi with its lacy bubbles in summer” (Kapur, *Daughters* 19). And it is quite later sometime that we find Virmati and her mother reach Lahore to get her admitted in Rai Bahadur Sohan Lal Training College for Women- a compound which was away from the fashionable part of the city, to the mother’s relief. The scene here from shifts to Lahore where begins another sojourn of Virmati of exploring herself and her freedom in this world. To Virmati, “any place was welcome, any place that promised to bring sense and purpose to her life” (Kapur, *Daughters* 114). The sense and purpose which she imagined finding amidst the society which was not even related to her. The sense and purpose which she believes education could provide her with.

Shakuntla- her extended family is her greatest inspiration. It is Shakuntla who has “planted the seeds of aspiration” (Kapur, *Daughters* 19), in her. She puts her to think that, “It was possible to be something other than a wife” (Kapur, *Daughters* 19). Shakuntla to her represented the unseen world of Lahore which she craves desperately to imbibe.

Virmati, looking at her glamorous cousin, marveled at the change Lahore had wrought in her. What did it matter that Shakuntala's features were not good? She looked better than merely pretty. She looked vibrant and intelligent, as though she had a life of her own. Her manner was expansive, she didn't look shyly around for approval when she spoke or acted. (Kapur, *Daughters* 16)

Virmati wants to be exactly like her "whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and a child" (Kapur, *Daughters* 17), as she is educated and could think beyond her duties. Physical appearance to Virmati does not matter much as this is where, for Virmati, the difference between an educated and an uneducated woman lies. Lahore fulfills her desire of higher education which at that time was considered the Oxford of the East. Virmati is put to thinking, "Maybe here was the clue to her happiness. It was useless looking for answers inside the home. One had to look outside. To education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore colleges" (Kapur, *Daughters* 17). To A.M. Shah,

When a woman emotionally disturbed in her affinal home goes to her natal home for peace but finds it equally, if not more, disturbed, she says, '*Gharni uthi vanman ne vanman uthi aag*' (I go from the home to the forest but the forest is on fire). (qtd. in Patel 215)

From Amritsar to Lahore, from home into the outer world! Virmati makes friends with Swarna Lata, her room-mate who too aspires for independence which she thinks she too could get only in Lahore. They both become good friends immediately as they both share some motives together – freedom, independence, education, not have a family. Both of them engage themselves with the freedom movement participating in speeches, songs etc. Gandhiji's teachings are in full sway with most women adorning khadi, spinning charkha daily, supporting female education. The reader comes across a roster of women who could get themselves arrested for the noble cause. Names like Rameshwari Nehru, Perrin Barucha, Mohini Datta, Sita Rallia, Noor Ahmed, Mary Singh, and Pheroz Sheroff are mentioned in the novel bringing out the active participation of women in the movement.

One is reminded of novels like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* wherein a reader witnesses women who choose to dismantle the boundaries of conventional patriarchy and think of a life beyond family.

Rangamma and Ratna, the two educated widows in Kanthapura are the 'new woman' who emerge as the beacon leading the war. Gandhi of Kanthapura, Moorthy, selects Rangamma one of the members of the Congress Panchayat Committee saying, "We need a woman for the Committee of the Congress is for the week and the lowly" (Rao 81). She is an educated woman who becomes a source of inspiration to other women making them aware of their rights. She is a subscriber to newspapers from the city like *Tai-nadu*, *Vishwakarnataka*, *Deshabanddhu*, and *Jayabhartha*. Telling them about Laxmibai she is the one who trains them to endure the blows of police saying, "...we shall fight the police for Kenchamma's sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as silken thread and you will hymn out the name of Mahatma" (Rao 112). Later, in the absence of Rangamma it is Ratna, another educated widow who leads and directs women. In Kamala Markandaya's novel *Some Inner Fury* it is the woman journalist Roshan Merchant who becomes the principal nationalist figure during the Quit India Movement of 1942. She is highly critical of the British Government and devotes a column in her magazine she owns writing critically and condemning it. Later in the novel she gets actively involved with the nationalist struggle. Shakuntla and Swarna Lata in *Difficult Daughters* are seen actively participating giving speeches, attending seminars. As Tara puts it, "It is easy to devalue the efforts of these difficult daughters but necessary not to do so. It is the very effort during that time that needs to be applauded" (Tara's). Where Shakuntla and Swarna Lata turn out victorious creating a niche for themselves, become independent, Virmati again turns a failure. She does not belong here also. She is forced to deliberate and think,

Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love Wasting it. Well, not wasting time, no, of course not, but then how come I never have a moment for anything else (Kapur, *Daughters* 142).

While during a congregation Miss Saubhagya Sehgal, "chairman of the reception committee, gave the welcome address" (Kapur, *Daughters* 143), Virmati does not know if they are still at the welcome stage. Even Lahore does not provide Virmati with

happiness and an identity which she is looking for. “Amazed at how large an area of life these women wanted to appropriate for themselves” (Kapur, *Daughters* 144), Virmati “felt an impostor sitting in the hall” (Kapur, *Daughters* 144). Dora Sales Salvador in her Spanish translation of the novel says,

Kapur emphasizes the efforts made at that time by numerous women who, while demanding equal opportunities, equal access to education and life-opportunities going beyond convention, were a visible force in the non-violent resistance to the British. (qtd. in Chhikara 190)

Amritsar, Lahore and then Sirmour State. Sirmour is ruled by a forward-looking educated woman Pratibha who wants the girls of her state to be educated. Thus, begins another journey for Virmati who is engaged as a teacher at Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya. Kasturi is offended by the unseen turn of events once again. But fortunately or unfortunately there is no stopping for Virmati one more time. Once more her mother’s voice is heard disheartened and succumbed to the conditions, “What kind of *kismet* is ours that our eldest daughter remains unmarried like this?” (Kapur, *Daughters* 181). But, Virmati too excited by the prospects of leaving her family behind in search of freedom still does not know, “that for her love and autonomy could not co-exist” (Kapur, *Daughters* 185). It is for the first time in the novel during her stay at Nahan that Virmati feels happy about her existence, about herself. Quite content with her qualification which is more than any other teacher at school, quite content with her performance and achievement during the day perhaps! But this could not continue for long and Virmati is expelled ashamed of her dismissal, ashamed of herself. “She would not go to Amritsar. What face did she have left to show there?” (Kapur, *Daughters* 197).

Virmati and the Professor finally settle into a relationship of husband and wife. “Virmati was sure that neither parents nor grandfather would ever forgive her. The process of rejection that had started with Tarsikka would be completed. Let them damn her as they might, at least she had this new life” (Kapur, *Daughters* 207). And another sojourn, another journey of Virmati with new hopes and new expectations in a new family begins. As Virmati’s ill luck would have it in this new family again she is a loner. She has nobody to side her. Kishori Devi – mother-in-law accepts the inevitable circumstance but holds Virmati responsible pondering, “How was it his fault if he was

caught in the trap of some shameless young Punjabi?” (Kapur, *Daughters* 210). As a gesture of non-acceptance she is given a dressing room, off the bedroom. Things start taking a real picture soon after the wedding. Virmati cannot have milk in the morning which she is used to, because Harish likes having tea, she is served food before anyone else being treated as a guest and not family, only her clothes are not brought in which are left hanging outside in the “angan” (Kapur, *Daughters* 215), has no claim over anything that belongs to him or that could give her the sense of belongingness to him. “From washing his clothes to polishing his shoes, to tidying his desk, dusting his precious books... mending his clothes, hemming his dhotis, seeing that they were properly starched- Ganga did it all” (Kapur, *Daughters* 216). Lack of understanding, love, acceptance in a family becomes Virmati’s destiny and frustrated she ponders if, “this isolation would continue till the end of her life” (Kapur, *Daughters* 215).

Her life revolves full circle reaching where it started from. She comes back to Amritsar after all her attempts to find a space and herself in the outer world. But nothing changes for Virmati. She could not find happiness in her natal house amongst her family members, finds herself not belonging to the women in Lahore who thought of their lives beyond husband and children something which Virmati always wanted, could not have a long stay at Nahan where she establishes a veneer of happiness around the small family of her students, is not accepted into the immediate family of her husband, is abandoned by her mother on her return to her after the demise of her father for one last time. Dora Sales Salvador in the Spanish translation of the novel says:

En esta novela lo destacable es que la disyunción entre el peso de la tradición adscrita al género, por una parte, y los deseos de independencia y autoafirmación, por otra, no se plantea como una mera dicotomía de opciones vitales. No es blanco o negro, en ningún caso. Hay toda una gama de complejos grises emocionales entre estas dos alternativas.” (“In this novel, one needs to stress that the disjunction between the weight of gender-determined tradition, on the one hand, and the yearning for independence and self-affirmation, on the other, does not appear as a simple dichotomy of life-choices. In no case are things black and white. There is a whole range of complex emotional shades of grey between the two alternatives”. (qtd. in Rollason 4)

In a family the male head and his counterpart are like pillars on which the entire foundation of their life is laid bare. Man is the dominant figure making all the decisions nonetheless, his existence is incomplete without his better half. As Ahuja, a sociologist quotes, "Women are the embodiment of all divine virtues on earth. Soma has bestowed all his purity on them, Gandharvah has given them sweetness of speech and fire has showered all his brilliance to make them most attractive" (19). Where to Ahuja women were given their share of respect and honor during ancient period, to Simone de Beauvoir changes have come in present times as she shares a different stance on this observing:

The young girl's freedom of choice has always been much restricted... marriage is her only means of support and the sole justification of her existence. It is enjoined upon her for two reasons. The first reason is that she must provide the society with children... for the second reason why marriage is enjoined is that a woman's function is also to satisfy a male's sexual needs and to take care of his household. (447)

Woman more often has been taken as a mere object, a commodity. Simone substantiates this by saying, "In primitive societies the paternal clan, the gens, disposed of woman almost like a thing: she was included in deals agreed upon by two groups" (446). Virmati's fate is no different. Though history seems to have moved forward, women seem to have been liberated, lest things stand where they were. No matter how hard Virmati tries to fight the currents of water, no matter how hard Virmati tries to swim against the flow she still could not come out untouched by its destructive nature. Perhaps the time lapse between the primitive societies and today's modern scenario could not see itself through without the blemishes of earlier times.

Another important relation in a family explored by Kapur is that of a husband and wife between Harish and Virmati. A teacher at AS College, Amritsar, 'the Professor' as he is called in the novel came to like Virmati while he stayed as a lodger in their house and taught Virmati at AS College. Without much deliberation they both realize that they are in love. The Professor, "insisting on death if she were so cruel as to deny him" (Kapur, *Daughters* 47) and to Virmati, "the Professor's desire to possess had extended to her heart and mind" (Kapur, *Daughters* 47). The persistent endearments from the

Professor and things start to change for Virmati. “That he looked at her, she knew. That he paid attention to her, she was aware. But to think of him was impossible, given the gulf between them, until he bridged it by crying out his need. Eldest and a girl, she was finally tuned to neediness, it called to her blood and bones. He spread his anguish at her feet...” (Kapur, *Daughters* 54). A few salutations and Virmati decides to disengage herself from Inderjeet- her fiance. Things take a wrong turn from there on. The disclosure to the family brings Virmati a lot of trouble and things shape up in a way that Virmati is called by Shakuntla her extended family to Lahore which finally her parents agree upon. This sojourn though brought a sigh of relief to the family taking Virmati- the trouble maker, away to another place wherefrom the parents think things would fall into place after her return, yet the currents of destiny were gathering in a tidal wave, waiting to engulf everything that came its way. The professor gets a chance to woo the lady once more looking for opportunities to have her out of the college where she is studying. He would write her letters with different names, different references sure of the fact that she would understand. He would call her posing herself as one of her brother’s or ask one of the lady friends of Syed’s to call her and try coaxing her out of the college. Finally, he succeeds and a meeting gets fixed. They both go to his friend’s red-bricked house discussing the Professor’s second baby, Professor trying to talk her out of this issue by distracting her thoughts through his soft endearments against her throat and ears. The Professor has his way through her body and gets her pregnant. “‘Don’t,’ she whispered. ‘Please.’ ‘Why? Aren’t you mine? And I yours? Body and soul, heart and mind? I worship you, Viru, I want to express it, that’s all’” (Kapur, *Daughters* 125). The Professor rather had two women at his disposal- a wife and a beloved- one in India and the other in Lahore. He could have his way with them both. One craves for his attention but she is illiterate the other’s attention he craves for as she is educated.

The writer emphasizes on the themes namely those of honor and shame and education in her work. Honor of the family is a major concern to the characters. From grandfather to parents to aunt-in-law, honor of the family precedes everything else. No matter what Virmati desires but she should marry because Lala Diwan Chand has a high name in the society and that it will bring a bad name to the family if she does not. There’s a long cue of her sisters and she being the eldest should marry for their sake.

No matter what Virmati wants or thinks she should think of the family and its honour. Lala Diwan Chand, the grandfather, is so much concerned that he gets built, “an enclosure” next to the bridge, “so that the daughters of the house could swim in privacy, sheltered from any eye that might glance upon their fair bodies in wet and revealing clothes” (Kapur, *Daughters* 72). Another instance of his concern comes forth after Virmati’s attempt to drown herself goes futile. “As he talked, his hands were unwrapping the *chaddor* from around himself and transferring it to Virmati’s shoulders. He did this without giving her more than a cursory glance” (Kapur, *Daughters* 84).

Education seems to be important to the family but only until it serves different purposes to different people. For Lala Diwan Chand, Virmati’s education could bring in good prospects of grooms. As it is they were blessed with beauty and that both would have, “its function in attracting the right-minded towards his family” (Kapur, *Daughters* 24). To Suraj Prakash, the father, education of her daughter is important to enable compatibility between the husband and the wife. As Suraj Prakash utters to the Prime Minister of Sirmour State, “With the boys becoming educated, and often opting for professional careers, there is the need for girls to keep up with them. Otherwise, where is the compatibility?” (Kapur, *Daughters* 179). The Professor is embarrassed of his first wife as he has nothing in common with her. “I do what I can for everybody. But, to satisfy all of you, I am supposed to live my life tied to a woman whom I have nothing in common. Who cannot even read. Who keeps a *ghunghat* in front of my friends” (Kapur, *Daughters* 209). With the change in traditional value system there has also come a change in the familial relationships. *Ghunghat* or ‘veil’ was considered an ornament in the ancient society. But with the influence of the west and the consequent changing scenario it has now become an outdated, an obsolete practice. It is the conflict between the traditional set up and the modern influence that gets highlighted with Harish marrying Virmati.

Virmati is different as she is educated and could converse well with his so called well versed friends. And for Virmati herself education is a mere means of escape - an escape from her pity lot which no one else could improve, an escape from the monotonous hullabaloo of her siblings as also the passive platitudes of her mother.

No, WOMAN is not our brother; through indolence and deceit we have made of her a being apart, unknown, having no weapon other than sex, which not only means constant warfare but unfair warfare – adoring or hating, but never a straight friend, a being in a legion with esprit de corps and freemasonry – the defiant gestures of the eternal little slave. (Beauvoir 725)

Silence is a woman's mightiest weapon and her greatest strength. Although they are acquiescent yet no longer do they desire to live like a "being apart" addressed as an "unknown" entity. No unit, be it social or political or family for that matter can subdue them or snub them. Women are like those filaments of grass which no matter if they get uprooted yet find another soil to sprout. *Difficult Daughters* is a story which deals with all kinds of relationships in a family namely mother-daughter, father-son, husband-wife, siblings, sister-in-laws, dealing with how a woman tries to establish herself and live her life on her terms amidst all these relations with all kinds of hindrances from each relation. The novel brings out the role of a family in a woman's life and how conflicts and tensions arise between the first and the second generation owing to the first generation women's traditional hang up and the second generation women's desire to move with the world creating a niche for themselves in the patriarchal world.

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CHAPTER – 3

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*: Exploring Oneself Within the Folds

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

(Frost qtd. in Poirier 146)

Frost's depiction of the 'empty spaces' upon his observation of a snow-covered field is an explicit reflection of his own personal sense of isolation, emotional dejection and sense of despair which is also quite evident in the writings of Salman Rushdie, V.S.Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri among others, who got catapulted into the creed of diasporic writers with her *The Interpreter of Maladies*-a sturdy collection of nine short stories. Her works transcend across borders irrespective of caste or nationality. A cardinal story-writer who writes about love, loss, death, marriage, familial bond, relationships and the situations which are so universal that the stories transcend Bengali tapestry and become associable for almost every individual.

Born to Bengali immigrant parents, life to Jhumpa has always been a constant act of balancing between the newly acquired traditions of the foreign land and the always present culture of back home either in the kitchen or the dressing sense of her mother or in the drawing room or her language. Jhumpa Lahiri confesses,

I went to Calcutta neither as a tourist nor as a former resident- a valuable position. I think as a writer. I learned to observe things as an outsider and yet I also knew that as different as Calcutta is from Rhode Island, I belonged there in some fundamental ways I didn't seem to belong in the United States. (qtd. in Mathur 122)

Indian society in the late twentieth and early twenty first century has become a society in which institutions like marriage and family are changing from closely bound institutions to more of independent individualized institutions. Western society- in particular American society- is more counter culturalist where institutions, familial bonds

and behavioral structures are more individualistic and much less demanding. Jhumpa Lahiri as a short story writer explores the two conceptions of familial and social institutions. She deals with family as an institution wherein she probes the relationships between the members in her stories, not commenting on them but presenting the episodes of her characters to the readers from a safe distance. To the writer relationships seem important and valuable as an association but become a burden as an expectation as is evident through the characters of her stories. What Randall Jarrell said of Frost's poetry can be said of Lahiri's fiction as well.

It is hard to overestimate the effect of this exact, spaced-out, prosaic movement, whose objects have the tremendous strength. . .of things merely put down and left to speak for themselves. . .Frost's seriousness and honesty; the bare sorrow with which, sometimes, things are accepted as they are, neither exaggerated nor explained away; the many, many poems in which there are real people with their real speech and real thought and real emotion—all this, in conjunction with so much subtlety and exactness. . .makes the reader feel that he is not in a book but a world.... The grimness and awfulness, and untouchable sadness of things, both in the world and in the self, have justice done to them in the poems....
(Jarrell)

Lahiri accepting in an interview, with Lavina Melwani for the Hindustan Times magazine, to be an "interpreter of the emotions of pain and affliction", (qtd. in Mathur 122) writes about the search of female characters of the 'self' in a family as an institution, which intends to be the focal attempt of the chapter. Her women like Megan, Sudha, Sang, Hema (*Unaccustomed Earth*) are all second-generation independent women who are caught up in some dilemma, straddling two cultures trying to balance their lives searching for that one revelation that could protect them and their lives from getting lost in the labyrinth of dejection created by their desire to have a bit of both- the past and the present. The most affected by the same are Ruma and Mrs. Sen (*Interpreter of Maladies*). Also family figures as an inevitable part of her stories wherein the members share a restlessness amongst themselves resultant of the frustration ensued by their feeling of uprootedness and their eagerness to preserve their roots quite, "representative of Indians in America" (Garg 71).

The title *Unaccustomed Earth*, taken from a passage in the Custom House of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* propounds that transplantation of people into new or unaccustomed soil is necessary just like potatoes to have an exponential proliferation in the potentiality of the two- the soil and the people. But, paradoxically, Lahiri through her characters portrays the sorrow, dejection, insecurity, sense of identity loss and ambivalence on the new land experienced by people, the first generation still holding tight onto their traditional roots on 'new soils' and the second generation perplexed between the abstract cultural values of their parents and the new exotic world welcoming them with its open arms. To Nathaniel Hawthorne:

Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into *unaccustomed earth*. (qtd. in Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 1)

Delving vividly into the hearts of the American Indians Lahiri adroitly brings forth the idiosyncrasies of her characters who have moments of abominable lull into their lives owing to the growing differences between the second and the first generation, their desire to have their children (third generation) imbibe just something of their roots (Bengali) and also their want of the feeling of 'home'-liness on a foreign land. Quoting Spivak from *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* Nagpal states,

The mention of 'home' and 'outside' is not a specification of India at all, but rather the disappearance of India as the habitation of 'Indians'. (qtd. in Nagpal 1)

It is the endless search every moment of the characters where one can feel 'at home' outside in the world and inside in oneself that is a search not only at the geographical level but also psychological one that the diasporic writers are most concerned about, no less Jhumpa. The endeavour is to have created for oneself a space where one can feel liberated from the feelings of exclusion, subservience and domination. Dominique Nagpal articulating on the word 'home' says,

It symbolizes safe places, where there is no need to explain oneself to outsiders; it represent communities; moreover, it can elicit a nostalgia for a golden era that never was, a nostalgia that elides exclusion, power relations and difference. (1)

The want of peace so that one could just be oneself and that could either be within a family or outside is a dominant theme of the writings by Jhumpa Lahiri. Ruma, in the first story in *Unaccustomed Earth*, is awaiting her father, a 70 year old Indian immigrant to United States, a widower who has recently retired from a pharmaceutical company where he had been working for decades, and plans to spend a week with her. Ruma, who is expecting the second time, initially dreads her father's plan of staying with her and sees it as an infliction on her independence but eventually through the course of his stay in the story, comes to liking it to the extent of asking her father to stay with them for his remaining years.

Ruma feared that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way she was no longer used to. It would mean an end to the family she'd created on her own: herself and Adam and Akash, and the second child that would come in January.... (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 7)

Lahiri doesn't write from a 'feminist' perspective but from a 'feminine' perspective, simply presenting her women characters with as much objectivity, without giving any didactic conclusions. Ruma has been presented in a patriarchal structure where she fulfils the duties of a woman as a daughter, a wife and a mother yet she is independent in her own right. She names her son 'Akash', a name of an Indian origin in spite of marrying an American; after a two weeks period of bereavement following the death of her mother, she all of a sudden decides to abandon her job, "all she wanted was to stay with Akash, not just Thursdays and Fridays but every day" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 5); she has the liberty of making the decision of moving her father in with her which is again a very Indian practice and not Western (the practice of parents staying with their children). Growing up her mother's example, coming and settling on a new land for the sake of marriage, leading her after marriage life running after her toddlers was something Ruma always wanted to avoid. But this was her life now. Something she wanted to evade, unfortunately or fortunately was a part of her.

There were mornings she wished she could simply get dressed and walk out the door, like Adam. She didn't understand how her mother had done it. Growing up, her mother's example – moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage,

caring exclusively for children and a household – had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma’s life now. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 11)

Her father fears the fact of her daughter leading the same monotonous life everyday just like his wife which he thinks makes her unhappy in some way. The concern for her daughter makes up for him to take up the issue while on their way back from Akash’s swimming classes. The father inquires:

“Will this make you happy?” She didn’t answer him. Her mother would have understood her decision, would have been more supportive and proud. Ruma had worked fifty-hour weeks for years, had earned six figures while Romi was still living hand to mouth. She had always felt unfairly cast, by both her parents, into roles that weren’t accurate: as her father’s oldest son, her mother’s secondary spouse. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 36)

Unhappy though Ruma is with her position, Ruma doesn’t confront her father freely as, “somehow, she feared that any difference of opinion would chip away at the already frail bond that existed between them” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 37). But leading a life in Seattle which she could have unquestioningly led in India- Calcutta, is an evidence of freedom in its own right. Lahiri confesses, “As a young child, I felt that the Indian part of me was unacknowledged, and therefore somehow negated, by my American environment, and vice versa” (qtd. in Garg 72). Because Lahiri lived two lives so also do her characters Ruma and Boudi in *Hell Heaven* –the second story in the collection. The two lives that Ruma lives are on the surface, quite visible to the readers. She is aware of her Indian roots. She doesn’t wholeheartedly want her father to come in with them but still keeps her feelings to herself and has three generations living in the same house. Akash gets along very well with the father and it is only Akash, “with whom he felt a direct biological connection” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 54), oddly enough as he is half-Bengali without a Bengali surname. He spends most of his time with his grandson reading stories to him before sleep, taking him for a swimming session, capturing him in his camera, keeping him occupied with him in the garden while he is planting new trees so as to let Ruma have some of her time for herself. A new bond establishes between him and Akash which Ruma not in the least expects. Knowing her father’s nature she just expects him to be a burden, a responsibility on her at a time

when she rather wants someone to take all her responsibilities. The estrangement keeps on growing between both of them with every passing day, the unanswered questions looming large between them both being aware of it without having to say anything explicitly.

He didn't expect her to take him in, and really, he couldn't blame her. For what had he done, when his own father was dying, when his own mother was left behind? By then Ruma and Romi were teenagers. There was no question of his moving the family back to India, and also no question of his eighty-year-old mother moving to Pennsylvania. He had let his siblings look after her until she, too eventually died. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 29)

The father reflects upon his own decision when he too was in a similar position of deciding between his duties as a son and his, "ambition and accomplishment, none of which mattered anymore, he had forsaken them" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 51). Ruma oscillating the two cultures lives a second life of that of an American and is not able to decide until quite later in the story if she should ask her father to move in with her. Had she been staying in India may be these dilemmas would not have existed at all for her. But before Ruma could decide and favour or oblige her father he hastens for his next journey to Italy to be together with Mrs. Bagchi once again strengthening his position of an immigrant thus adroitly putting down Ruma's half-hearted proposal.

It was always a question of allegiance, of choice. I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations. I also wanted to meet the expectations of my American peers, and the expectations I put on myself to fit into American society. It's a classic case of divided identity, but depending on the degree to which the immigrants in question are willing to assimilate, the conflict is more or less pronounced. My parents were fearful and suspicious of America and American culture when I was growing up. Maintaining ties to India, and preserving Indian traditions in America, meant a lot to them. They're more at home now, but it's always an issue, and they will always feel like, and be treated as, foreigners here.... Things like dating, living on one's own, having close friendships with Americans, listening to Americans and eating American food- all of it was a mystery to them.... I felt that I led two separate lives. (qtd. in Nagpal 56)

The American-ness of Ruma stops her from asking her father to stay. The complexity of behaviour and the circumstances has been beautifully dealt with by the writer in the characters of Ruma and her father. Most of the times it is the circumstances that the characters are placed into that brings out their real self or forces them to ponder over their own position if and when placed in a similar situation as is the case with Ruma's father. Also, the father has moved forward just as he thinks has his daughter. There's another side to his life that only he is aware of and nobody else of his immediate family is a witness to. He intends it to be the same. Though during the stay he thinks over the prospect of hiding it from his daughter, something that the parents do not expect their children doing in their childhood or adolescence and he in an old age is doing so. But the writer makes it very clear at the outset that it is only for the need of companionship that he finds in Mrs. Bagchi that makes him turn his life into a constant journey. Both of them share the same bed on their trips but there is never the desire for physical love. He readily accepts the fact that she loves her husband of two years more than he loves his wife of forty years and that she carries his photograph in her wallet, "It was not passion that was driving him, at seventy, to be involved, however discreetly, however occasionally, with another woman. Instead it was the consequence of being married all those years, the habit of companionship" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 30). Moreover, it is the desire to be free from responsibilities and expectations that is taking him away from his family. His shoulders have taken enough responsibility and he fulfilled enough duties to take any more of them be it of Ruma or Akash.

He did not want to be part of another family, part of the mess, the feuds, the demands, the energy of it. He did not want to live in the margins of his daughter's life, in the shadow of her marriage. He didn't want to live again in an enormous house that would only fill up with things over the years, as the children grew, all the things he'd recently gotten rid of, all the books and papers and clothes and objects one felt compelled to possess, to save. Life grew and grew until a certain point. The point he had reached now. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 53)

Just like Ruma, the father also leads two lives- one that of a father, "A part of him, the part of him that would never cease to be a father" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 53), and the other as that of a lover- that he does not consciously want to cease in him.

There are some questions that pop up in the mind of the reader that the writer does not try and answer like why could the father never tell his daughter or why could he not establish faith in the fact, that staying on a foreign land in an American culture, his daughter would still accept him as her father even if she were to know it. It is for the unsaid but acknowledged gap that has seeped into the relation of a father and a daughter that he keeps it to himself. A critic claims,

Lahiri steps back from the action, gets out of the way, so the people and things in her stories can exist the way real things do: richly, ambiguously, without explanation. (Time)

The second character who lives a life at two levels just like Lahiri, Ruma and the father is Boudi- the mother in the story *Hell-Heaven*. The story *Hell-Heaven* begins in somewhere around 1970s and concludes in the present bringing out the experience of a married Indian Bengali woman, who living in a loveless life in America faces the dilemma of being, entangled in two cultures- the newly acquired American culture and the accustomed Indian culture. The story also throws some light on the fact that how the experience of finding an Indian family that too of same culture in the foreign land enables the stay of the Indian -Americans get more accommodating.

The existence of Aparna (the mother) in the story is manifested in four relationships that she shares with the people around her- that of a mother, a wife, a beloved that she herself takes onto be, and that of a quasi-in-law (to Deborah) that with the passage of time she comes to accept willingly or unwillingly. Still these manifestations are not enough to let her have a reason to live, to be happy, content, complete as a woman. Pranab Kaku is a Bengali Indian from Calcutta who washes ashore into their lives when they do not have too many acquaintances in America. He is from a wealthy family so much so that he does not have to care enough to pour himself a glass of water. In America studying engineering from MIT, he is easily befriended by Shyamal's family who have their daughter call him as Pranab Kaku and not Chakraborty, Pranab Kaku in turn calls him Shyamal Da and his wife Aparna- Boudi, a name for an elder brother's wife. But this name it appears, as the story progresses, is used merely as a societal escapist epithet by Pranab Kaku and on the sly by Boudi as well.

Pranab Kaku shows her the world that Shyamal Da never could. She shares a lot in common with him ranging from the same native place in India to the same taste in music, in films, actors which she does not share in common with her husband. Pranab Kaku enjoys a special place in Boudi's heart. His visits are anticipated and eagerly awaited by her. The cuisine which would only be prepared on Sundays' for her husband and her daughter now becomes almost an everyday affair. Pranab Kaku does all the things for her that she always wanted her husband to do. He gives her his precious time, lends her a keen ear by listening to her stories of her childhood, "absorbing the vanishing details of her past.... He did not turn a deaf ear to her nostalgia, like my father, or listen uncomprehending, like me" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 66).

Pranab Kaku fills the empty space in her life "Wherever we went, any stranger would have naturally assumed that Pranab Kaku was my father, that my mother was his wife" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 66). She shares only a kind of marital relation with her husband which survives without emotions. Family does not only mean a husband and a wife living together but it is the emotions, the love and intimacy in the relationship that holds a relation together. This is what really is missing in their relation. Family, rather is an institution which constitutes members amidst whom a person shares the most intimate and personal emotions. This feeling which she should have experienced with her husband, unfortunately she does with an outsider whom she easily takes to be family.

The family is sustained in a major way by the multiple roles played by its female constituents; but their contribution in terms of paid work, and unpaid work and care activities do not receive the recognition due from society. (Dasgupta 65)

The position of women in today's time, in a family, to some extent does not seem to have changed much. Boudi still feels suffocated in the web of family that surrounds her where she has a daughter and a husband too but none who could give her all happiness. Shyamal, "a lover of silence and solitude" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 65), is actually wedded to his profession and marries Aparna only to placate his parents who give him an ultimatum. His attitude is quite evident in the lines,

...he existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate. Conversation was a chore for him; it required an effort he preferred to expend at the lab. He

disliked excess in anything, voiced no cravings or needs apart from the frugal elements of his daily routine: cereal and tea in the mornings, a cup of tea after he got home, and two different vegetable dishes every night with dinner. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 65)

Besides father, even Usha taking her cues from her father learns to isolate her mother from her life making her life more desolate and miserable. Usha would shout back, keep secrets from her, make her realize how “pathetic” she was or unneeded, “definitively and abruptly” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 77), she had been. Pranab Kaku at this time comes to her as a guardian angel. Her emotions for Pranab Kaku throw light on the fact that how a woman feels complete and important in a family only if she is taken care of, loved, given importance, and appreciated for her daily household chores both by her husband and her children. Women desire to be loved as they are blessed with a tendency to bestow unconditional love. A part of Pranab Kaku always overshadows her. Not only in the only photograph that pictures the three of them together (Usha, Pranab and Boudi) but, also in real life every bit of him overshadowed her- her thoughts, her existence.

There is only one photograph in which my mother appears; she is holding me as I sit straddling her lap, her head tilted toward me, her hands pressed to my ears as if to prevent me from hearing something. In that picture, Pranab Kaku’s shadow, his two arms raised at angles to hold the camera to his face, hovers in the corner of the frame, his darkened, featureless shape superimposed on one side of my mother’s body. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 64)

Shyamal Da’s every absence has Pranab Kaku’s presence. The photograph symbolizes the plot of the story. Boudi exists on two different levels. One is at the level that is captured rightly in the photograph and the other is the one that she leads as a wife and a mother. Pranab Kaku does not figure in the photograph as a concrete image but as a mere shadow and that is how he really exists in her life.

The world is not experienced by everyone in exactly the same way, however; nor is it experienced by the same person in the same way all the time. But there are connecting threads running through these ‘multi-realities’, which provides an individual with an on-going sense of self. (Brah 20)

The sense of self is what Boudi is looking for straddling the two realities. The one which she tries finding living amidst her family and the other which she finds in Pranab Kaku – her unconscious self.

Lahiri does not try to deconstruct 'patriarchy' which is one of the objectives of feminism but investigates into the emotional quotient of her characters especially women. She is a writer of emotions and not of social issues like property, hatred, incestuous love, or passion. Her writings are about diasporic-Bengali-Hindu-middle class people who have nothing dramatic about their lives or anything of a sort of larger than life scenario. Her characters are basically educated professionals doing academically well, either working or studying at reputed institutions, like, Pranab Kaku studying engineering at MIT, Sudha earning her second master's from the London School of Economics, Sang completing her graduation from New York University and dropping in the middle from Harvard feeling quite monkish writing papers every new day for the coming conference, Hema a doctorate in classics, leading ordinary day to day life.

The time goes on in her stories with some characters growing in spatial and temporal terms like Sudha and Rahul in *Only Goodness* and Hema and Kaushik in the three connected stories with the same title *Hema and Kaushik*; the reader sees Sudha growing from a child of six years, studying at Philadelphia, moving to London for her higher education to finally becoming a wife and a mother settling in London with her husband Roger Featherstone, whereas, Rahul we get to know about since the time of his birth to the time he gets married to Elena-an aspiring actress and a waitress at dinner at Waltham. Similarly Hema and Kaushik we are introduced to in the first story with Hema as the first person narrator and see through their lives, from their crisis to their love life to finally the time when Hema is back in India to marry Navin harboring a fancy for Kaushik since the time in her childhood when Kaushik and family come to stay with Hema's family. And Kaushik, the reader is bent upon to sympathize with owing to his miserably aimless vagabond life moving places in search of something which it seems the writer doesn't make explicit and seems to ask if it is the search for love, a true companion, a job or the sense of 'self'. This is where the peculiarity of her writings lie. Lahiri leaves it to the readers to have their own interpretations or conclusions not

defining anything. She explores the mysteriousness, the inexplicable, bewilderingly enigmatic behaviour of people sometimes which the readers are not able to comprehend and at the same time is so recognizable that one can easily associate oneself with in his/her life. In an interview with Vibhuti Patel she says,

In America we experienced a malnourished version of family, not the multiple experience my parents had known. In India it was comforting to see my parents let go the everyday concerns of being foreigners. There, everything was established- so many homes that we could visit, all family. Generations had been born there and we were connected to them. In the States, to be connected to anything, we had to reach out. (qtd. in Chatterji 113)

Mysteriousness is something that exists in human nature. There are moments of silence in her stories be it on phone or in car or a balcony facing the sea. This silence creeps into the lives of her characters where Lahiri desires her readers, to comprehend the situation just in absolute silence. Pranab Kaku woos Boudi for the time that he stays with them on and off. He would, “coax my mother through the woods” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 66), go for picnics, take them for a drive, have delicacies made by Boudi for him on demand, make her happy by appreciating her efforts for him and acknowledging and witnessing her ‘existence’. But to Boudi’s unfortunate luck she could never have him as anything more than a lover and Pranab very much aware of this from the start marries Deborah- an American to start a new life with on a foreign land. He leads a happy married life with her and has two daughters from her- Bonny and Sara. But after twenty three years of his marriage he walks out for another married Bengali woman whom he falls in love with. Adam, in the first story *Unaccustomed Earth*, does whatever he could to make Ruma happy. He allows her to leave her job, splurge on a big house in Seattle and have the liberty to make the decision to have her father move in with them. But after her mother’s death there is some uneasiness felt into their relation which she could not explain.

She could not explain what had happened to her marriage after her mother’s death. For the first time since they’d met, at a dinner party in Boston when she was a law student and he was getting his MBA, she felt a wall between them, simply because he had not experienced what she had, because both his parents

were still living in the house in Lincoln, Massachusetts, where Adam had been raised. It was wrong of her, she knew, and yet an awareness had set in, that she and Adam were separate people leading separate lives. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 25)

'Identity' to Avtar Brah is something that is "singularly elusive" (20) and that it keeps changing with the change of context and situation. No matter how well the characters are doing on a foreign land materialistically in her stories yet the search for identity lurks in their minds all the time. Be it in a family for a woman or outside it.

We live in ideas. Through images we seek to comprehend our world. And through images we seem to subjugate and dominate others. But picture-making, imagining can also be a process of celebration, even of liberation. New images can chase out the old. (Rushdie 147)

The ideas of the Orient concocted by the Occident have been ossified by repeated representations of the East in those terms by Western writers who have come to live with those images as true as "distortions and falsehood have a way of becoming true by virtue of being repeated" (Rushdie 5). Ideas form the basis of our conscious living. Our idea of the chivalry of the commandos executing their duties at the Taj Mahal site Mumbai or 9/11 WTC site is based on the idea that we as audience form through the images of them disseminated through electronic media or mass media as in films or fiction. But also ideas, when presented in a form of literature can become 'liberating' for a writer because articulation is one way of freeing oneself of the emotions, of exasperations as it appears to Rushdie that, "By articulating a grievance, I could help, or so I hoped, to build bridges of understanding" (4).

Jhumpa Lahiri through her works is trying to bridge that gap between the immigrants and the natives, holding a mirror to their problems by articulating them through the displaced lives of her characters. Gifted with the rare gift of writing, she seeks liberation in writing about her people.

'The past is a foreign country', goes the famous sentence of L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go Between*, 'they do things differently there'. But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time. (Rushdie 9)

Using the sentence in the opening chapter of his *Imaginary Homelands* entitled with the same title, illustrates in some way the bitterness that gnaws the inside of the writer being an immigrant, belonging to a minor community- the British Asian. Jhumpa Lahiri, similarly, gives vent to her embittered soul of belonging to another minor community- Bengali immigrant, by taking up Bengalis exclusively in her works. All kinds of human relations are explored in her stories of Bengalis including father-daughter (Ruma and her Father), mother-son/daughter (Ruma and her deceased mother, Akash and Ruma, Kaushik and his mother, Usha and Boudi), husband-wife (Amit and Megan, Ruma and Adam, Sudha and Roger) brother-sister (Sudha and Rahul) and that of roommates (Sangeeta and Paul). The *Unaccustomed Earth* is like watching a movie with different characters and stories with different plots, threaded together some having causal-effect element to them and some not.

Rahul is a loser. He does not make it to anything in life. But his sister is doing good be it academically, pursuing Ph.D. from London School of Economics, or finding herself a husband in Roger Featherstone who is a Ph.D. in art history and is an editor with an art magazine or is living a happy married life as a mother in London in their newly bought house. Whereas Rahul, her brother fails at everything he does. He never goes for classes, flunks his papers, ends up having a very low grade, steals in his own house, never meets the expectations of his parents, and a son of affluent Bengali parents works at a Laundromat for three days a week.

And so he became what all parents feared, a blot, a failure, someone who was not contributing to the grand circle of accomplishments Bengali children were making across the country, as surgeons or attorneys or scientists, or writing articles for the front page of The New York Times. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 151)

It is Sudha who introduces Rahul to alcohol one weekend he comes to visit her at Penn and, “the next morning in the dining hall, his first cup of coffee” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 128). Rahul likes both beverages and pronounces them revolting. Then on, Rahul learns to have a life which comes to be defined only by alcohol. Rahul loves Sudha and confides in her more than he does in his parents. His love for his sister makes him visit her at London for the last time as it appears in the story. The life seems

to be, “at its most demanding and also gratifying” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 160), when she finds an envelope addressed in Rahul’s hand at the other side of the door slot. Sudha really looks up to his visit and once again recalls all the good times they spent together however, meagre. Yet something strange has set into their relation.

It felt strange to be at work for so much of the time that Rahul was visiting, but Sudha thought it was better, safer, that their time together was limited to mornings and evenings, times when Roger and Neel were around. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 167)

Sudha still in her sisterly love tries and establishes faith in Rahul and leaves Neel in his care when she and Roger go out for a movie. But as bad luck would have it, Rahul succumbs to his addiction once again which he has so diligently been trying to get rid of. And there it is, everything shatters for brother and the sister and this time it does for the brother-in-law as well as it already has for the parent’s long time back.

She returned to the kitchen, opened a cup-board, took out a packet of Weetabix, heated milk in a pan. Something brushed against her ankles, and she saw that the balloon tied to the back of Neel’s high chair was no longer suspended on its ribbon. It had sagged to the floor, a shrunken thing incapable of bursting. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 173)

Rahul is like the shrunken balloon incapable of bursting. Life again plays its trick on Rahul and this time there is just no way out. This time it is not just his grades or his career or his professional life but Neel- his nephew. Neel could have lost his life in the bathtub where he sits unattended with the cold water reaching upto his chest, he sitting inside without a plastic ring which Sudha usually put around so that he wouldn’t tip. One tumble and the child could have been in the water fighting for his life.

...she told him, about the very first time Rahul had come to visit her at Penn, and *how he hadn’t even liked beer*, and then about all the cans they’d hidden over the years and how eventually it was no longer a game for him but a way of life, a way of life that had removed him from her family and ruined him. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 171)

It is Sudha who introduces him to the world of alcohol. Who knows things could have not been that worse for Rahul had he not have ever visited Sudha at Penn or not

have tried alcohol ever at that tender age not knowing how to balance or control the urge. Sudha's one move finishes everything for Rahul. The consequences are bad enough that he goes far away from his family emotionally and geographically and now this time may be from himself as well.

Another story that has a causal-effect element to it is that of Shobha and Shukumar in *A Temporary Matter*, the first story of the collection entitled *Interpreter of Maladies*. They are a happily married couple and have been together for three years. Shobha has a still born baby and thereafter things change in their lives. They are no more a happy couple sharing and discussing familial stuff.

Instead he thought of how he and Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible. He thought of how he no longer looked forward to weekends, when she sat for hours on the sofa with her coloured pencils and her files, so that he feared that putting on a record in his own house might be rude. He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other's bodies before sleeping. (Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* 5)

The electricity line in their street has gone down. It is to be *a temporary matter* for five days. The death of their child has let a strangeness grow between the husband and the wife where they start avoiding each other and start parting ways. The one hour without electricity comes to them as a way of revitalising their barren lives, but Shobha's confessions that she peeped into his diary without his knowing it, letting him embarrass himself with her department chairman, finding his only published poem 'sentimental', and his confessions to her that he had cheated in an exam, exchanged a gifted sweater for cash, ogled at a ripped photograph of a woman from a magazine for days and had known the sex of their child which Shobha thought would remain a surprise for him also for the rest of his life, rather act as contrary and nothing improves. "The information fell between them, valuable for the years", they had kept from each other, "negligible now that," they had told (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 125), as it had been for Megan and Fox in *A Choice of Accomodations* in the third story of *The Unaccustomed Earth*. The

couple was blessed with two daughters Maya and Monika. But unlike Shobha and Shukumar there had been no particular reason for the near evaporation of love in their relationship.

He considered for a moment. “Actually, it was after the second that our marriage sort of” - he paused, searching for the right word - “disappeared.” He realized it was a funny word to use, but something had been lost, something had fallen through their fingers, and that was the only way he could put it. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 113)

Lahiri very scrupulously probes the void that gets created in the lives of people in her stories owing to either a reason which could range from their being placed on a foreign land and consequently the gamut of feelings associated with it or it simply is there without there being any running after a cause leaving it upto the readers to draw their own conclusions.

Symbols have always played an important role in the fiction writing. Lahiri makes use of symbols in her stories, as also architecture to allude to the inner turmoil of her characters. The symbols of plantation, use of blinds in the drawing room, the ocean, and darkness have been wisely employed by the writer to bring forth the emotion of guilt, love, protectiveness that members share in a family. The symbol of plantation has been used in the first story which has always occupied the father be it at the time when Ruma’s mother was alive or now when he visits Ruma after her mother’s death.

Gardening is his passion,

...working outdoors in the summers as soon as he came home from the office, staying out until it grew dark, subjecting himself to bug bites and rashes. It was something he’d done alone; neither Romi nor Ruma had ever been interested in helping, and their father never offered to include them”. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 16)

He has even “grown expert over the years at cultivating the things her mother liked to cook with—bitter melon and chili peppers and delicate strains of spinach” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 16). The first job that he performs at Ruma’s place is that of watering Delphiniums which he sees on the verge of dying. He buys himself all the equipment required for gardening from a shovel to a rake and a hose, to “bags of

topsoil, flats full of flowers” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 43). Planting of new plants, shrubs and flowers is symbolic in two ways.

One, the plantation of new plants in the story is symbolic of the new life that is to adorn Ruma’s life. The fertility of the soil also symbolizes the fertility of a woman. The soil bears new plants, provides it with all kinds of nutrients and helps it grow. Similarly, Ruma is bearing her second child, and the plantation of the new plants in the backyard of her house is symbolic of the second child that would soon be a part of Ruma’s life. The plantation of plants could also be seen as a last tribute by a husband to his wife who is somewhere in his heart guilty of being friends with an elderly woman at this age without the daughter knowing about it.

Blinds also play an important role in her stories thus symbolic of the role a mother plays in a family protecting the house from the outer world. The symbol of blinds figures in two of her stories *Hell-Heaven* and *Only Goodness*.

...every after-noon when the sun shone through the living-room window my mother closed the blinds so that our new furniture would not fade. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 76)

The soft rays of the sun which the windows could not manage to keep out of the house are symbolic of the new cultural values that have entered into their lives especially the daughter- the values which slowly and stealthily seem to be gnawing at their lives, creating lacunae’s which Boudi tries to fill in. The mother’s closing of blinds symbolizes the efforts made by a mother to protect her house, the lives of the inmates from the outside world closing the blinds to the world. She is afraid of any change that she thinks could only be for the worse and not betterment thus, ruining the familial cultural grounds which she has been trying to hold onto in a foreign land. This brings out the important role that a mother plays in a family trying to protect the members even after being despised by them, as she is in this case by her daughter who hates her the most for her trying to stand between the unfriendly, harsh ,uncultured outside world and her daughter. A critic confesses,

The first five stories are varied and accomplished [and the final three] are gripping and affecting... Whereas so many story collections feel like grab-bags, *Unaccustomed Earth* seems to have poured forth from the author’ pen in one

swoop, and it eloquently circles back over the same sets of themes and motifs without getting tired. It's like a symphony in eight movements. (Kelly, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*)

Similarly, the symbol of blinds figures in *Only Goodness* as well when Sudha comes home to spend a week with her parents after being accepted at London School of Economics, devoting herself completely to her parents, watching television with her father and helping her mother upholster the house.

She was accepted at LSE, and in June she came home to Wayland for a week. During her visit, Sudha gave herself fully to her parents, watching Wimbledon with her father on television, helping her mother cook and order new blinds for the bedrooms. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 139)

Then, large body of water forms an inevitable part of her stories. Ocean figures as an important symbol in the three connected stories *Hema and Kaushik* of the collection *Unaccustomed Earth* as also it does in *Mrs. Sen* in the *Interpreter of Maladies*. Ocean symbolizes turbulence of the minds of people as also it symbolizes the calmness, serenity that one experiences amidst the sound of the waves. It also teaches one a lesson to glide smoothly in life. Ocean is not bound by walls or boundaries along its sides. It is just free to move in any direction. The symbol of ocean in the stories refers to the unfathomable sadness, dejection in the lives of her characters just like the depth of the water body, as also to the desire to be free of the expectations, the uneasiness, and the strangeness that has become a part of their lives. Kaushik sees the image of his deceased mother for the last time in the water beside Henrik which passes as a blur just like the fish "darting from time to time" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 330). Kaushik spends most of his time moving places living like a vagabond, discovering quite late in his life what really interests him, finally getting a job at forty. Kaushik's mother would walk the shores whenever she would want to relax herself of the inevitable duties.

I wanted to continue driving, and so I kept going, heading toward the next town, where there was a beach my mother used to like for an occasional change of scenery. This required getting on the highway, and I found it satisfying, accelerating for a short while along the empty, impersonal road. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 271)

Eventually, Kaushik has in store something of the fate of his mother which has something to do with water. Kaushik spends his last days on the shores of a beach. He loses his life trying to feel at ease in the water when it comes in its fury and claims his life.

It was there that my mother prepared to depart for another place altogether, one where we would be unable to join her, and from which she would not return.

(Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 291)

He joins his mother from where there is just no looking back. Likewise, the symbol has been used in *Mrs. Sen* from the *Interpreter of Maladies* where the usage of expressions like “barricaded” and “roped off” in the lines, “She would have roped off the area if she could. Once, though, she broke her own rule, in need of additional supplies, and reluctant to rise from the catastrophic mess that barricaded her...” (Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* 127), bring to one’s notice the feeling of isolation, turbulence, seclusion that she suffers from. The character and the water body share some similarity though here the similarity is individualistic that it refers to the seclusion of Mrs. Sen and the turbulence of her inside coincides with the magnanimity of the waves. The similarity in the water body and Kaushik is different where Kaushik’s turbulence inside him ends in the sea trying to catch hold of his mother whose image he sees in the water. The bond between the sea and Kaushik is more personal than it is for Mrs. Sen.

“To live so close to the ocean and not to have so much fish”. In the summer, she said, she liked to go to a market by the beach. She added that while the fish there tasted nothing like the fish in India, at least it was fresh. Now that it was getting colder, the boats were no longer going out regularly, and sometimes there was no whole fish available for weeks at a time. (Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* 134)

Family is quite important to Lahiri which is why the institution holds an important place in almost all her stories. The first generation and the second generation seem to be in conflict with each other with second generation facing greater crisis than the first. The crisis is quite evident in case of Ruma, Usha, Sang. It is with the coming of Pranab Kaku in their lives that identity crisis in Usha comes to the fore. Deborah and Usha’s mother represent two extreme cultures. She feels attracted to Deborah’s culture which

she wants to be a part of, but is also pulled by her mother's culture which she feels clutching her foot, not letting her free. Boudi wants to preserve her Bengali culture as much as she can through Usha. Barbara Watson claims,

When Shaw thinks about women, something remarkable happens. He makes no assumptions. It would be wonderful enough to make no assumptions about what women are fitted for, what their place in society should be. The real wonder is to begin thinking about women without assuming that there is any mystery at all. Shaw does so and, instead of wearing himself out trying to solve a mystery that does not exist, sets to work observing the life around him. (2)

What women are fitted for has remained a conundrum since quite a long time, for quite a large mass of writers and has been dealt with in a massive oeuvre of literature. Lahiri doesn't try and answer questions and does not place women within roles specified for them. Her women come out naturally behaving in a society or a family as any other woman would outside the created world of Lahiri. Mothers have an inevitable role to play in the lives of her women characters just as they do in real life. Usha, disparaging her mother for what she is, ultimately feels comfortable with her confessing to her all her affairs and night outs, telling her about her boyfriends. Ruma thinks of her mother more often after her death than she does when she was alive. Every moment that she spends with her father in her new house would give her a remembrance of her mother often recalling how her mother would have behaved in a certain circumstance.

There was a time Ruma felt closer to her mother in death than she had in life, and intimacy born simply of thinking of her so often, of missing her. But she knew that this was an illusion, a mirage, and that the distance between them was now infinite, unyielding. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 27)

Reticence of her father is what irritates her as it did to her mother. Often in moments of silence between her father and Ruma, she would imagine her mother saying her things. Every moment that her mother spent with Akash she remembers vividly, "her mother had refused to put him in the bassinet, always cradling him, for hours at a time, in her arms" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth* 17). She would knit sweaters for Akash, cook elaborate food for Adam without tiring of her job, play scrabble with Adam through internet, counsel Ruma over the color of her curtains or the color of her

interior, appreciate whatever she found interesting and depreciate whatever disinterested her in regards with her daughter- things which Ruma longed for but her father could never understand. The presence of mother even in her absence is also felt in the character of Kaushik who longs for the time spent with her mother and is not ready to accept his step mother as family. The importance of family can also be seen in the story *Only Goodness* when Sang goes back to her sister in London who she feels is the only one she could fall back upon at the time of crisis.

The collection *Unaccustomed Earth* is divided into two sections composed of eight short stories. One contains five independent stories and the second section contains three connected stories. The characters in all the stories are on a constant move, journeying for most of the time. Rather, the second word that could define their lives is – expedition. Almost all stories open with one or the other character either moving in (Ruma's father) or going out either shifting base (Pranab Kaku) or finding a house to themselves (Kaushik's parents). It is a search for something that defines the people of her stories. The title of the first story *Unaccustomed Earth* brings out the trait of all her characters- what it feels like to be placed on a foreign land. How excluded or secluded does one feel even amidst family with a strangeness developing between the inmates of the same enclosed setting which sometimes becomes difficult to decipher or comment upon. Even until the end of the collection, though finally we have two people acknowledging love between them in Hema and Kaushik yet they are found drifting apart "Going Ashore", still battling to find their roots and their self.

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CHAPTER 4

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

Feminist literary criticism where on one side brought to the surface the kind of representations of women that were made in canonical literary discourses, on the other it made women writers more assertive and self-assured of their female identities, cultural locations, their problems because of gender, their language, the themes as well as their hopes and desires. The descriptions and presentations of women in women's writings reinforced in no uncertain terms their claim to have an oeuvre of literature of their own i.e. literature by women, about women and from women's perspective.

Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri hailing from middle class strata of society take women from the middle class as their subjects who have nothing dramatic or larger than life scenario about their lives but are domestic women leading ordinary day to day lives. Despite their apparent geographical, cultural and contextual differences the predicaments of women that they reflect in their writings show some similarities. Family being an important unit forms the backdrop in both writers in which they place their women protagonists. Family constitutes members and the relations that they share namely mother-daughter, father-son, siblings, lovers, husband-wife that have been discussed by both writers. In *Difficult Daughters* and *Unaccustomed Earth* it is through familial relations that Kapur and Lahiri try to carve a picture of middle class women and their situations.

To both writers family is important and valuable as a unit of association and becomes a burden as a unit of expectations of set cultural and familial roles. Virmati desires to break away from her family as she is tired of shouldering responsibilities of a daughter and a sister. Ruma no longer wants her widowed father to stay with them and the father too embarks on another journey to Italy to be with his companion Mrs. Bagchi seeking personal freedom and doing away with his responsibility towards a pregnant daughter and a loving grandson.

As the axiom goes, 'Familiarity breeds contempt'. It is in the relations between mother-daughter and a husband-wife in a family that one becomes most familiar with the other person knowing that person's inside out with his flaws and virtues. And it is

around these two relations that the stories revolve. Mothers have been given an important place in both novels. Kasturi wants her daughter Virmati to make 'right' choices in her life- choices which confirm to societal norms- get settled, bear children and have a family. Ruma in *Unaccustomed Earth* finds a renewed closeness to her mother after her demise than she did when she was alive. Usha in *Hell-Heaven* finds her mother Boudi inconsequential as she considers her an obstacle to the road that leads her to a new world and culture of America. Lahiri also makes use of the symbol of blinds to signify the role of a mother. Closing of blinds by Boudi in the same story hints at the role that mothers play in safe guarding their family, particularly girls and women against the outer world. The husband-wife relation has also been given importance with Virmati craving for love in the Professor which she does not find in her family. Relation between Ruma and Adam, Pranab Kaku and Deborah, Shyamal Da and Aparna, Megan and Amit has been discussed in detail in the previous chapters. It is in these multiple familial relations that conflicts arise owing to the expectations that each member has from the other. The major thematic and emotional conflict in most stories of Jhumpa Lahiri arises from the conflicting pulls that each character experiences: to come up to the expectations of the other in light of the culturally validated and socially valorized behavior patterns, making sacrifices for the sake of the other and on the other hand, an innate quest for freedom and breaking away from all restrictive familial bonds.

To what extent is the family important in one's life is evident through the desire of companionship that the characters share. Not one individual can live in isolation owing to his instinct to socialize. Ruma's father in *Unaccustomed Earth* at the age of seventy finds a companion in Mrs. Bagchi knowing that she still direly loves her husband even after his death many years ago.

Not only men but also women desire to be loved and cared for and have a companion. Virmati sees a true companion in Harish-the Professor and goes to the extent of rebelling against her mother as and when required. Boudi in *Hell- Heaven* finds a true mate in Pranab Kaku as he lends her a patient ear, shares his secrets with her, shares her interests- everything that she desired her husband to do for her she found Pranab Kaku doing. Her desire of acknowledgement from her husband and daughter makes her easily accept Pranab Kaku as her family. The emotional

satisfaction and attention as an individual that these women long for is not available to them in their intimate family relationships or the conventional notion of the family. So they have to look elsewhere to find some space for themselves.

Another similarity that one finds in both writers is in reference to the voice given to male characters. Both have females as protagonists and voice lent to males is minimal. Hardly does one find a male voicing his inner self or participating in the main dialogue. Both writers deal basically with women, writing about the female world and their psyche. Male characters have been given roles but as they suit in reference to their female counterparts. Suraj Prakash in *Difficult Daughters* is a homely patriarchal figure as Kasturi the wife is a traditional conformist. Harish is unconventional as against Virmati who is revolutionary and rebellious. In *Unaccustomed Earth* one does not find male voice and the stories merely revolve around female characters whose lives are affected by the reticence of their male counterparts and the turbulence comes forth through the symbol of ocean that has been frequently used by Lahiri in *Unaccustomed Earth* signifying an important aspect of the family. Family being a unit of society has certain rules and norms that members are expected to conform to. Ocean symbolizes turbulence as also the calmness and serenity that one experiences amidst the cascades of the sounds of its fiery waves. But an ocean cannot be confined into a boundary. It cannot be demarcated. Its boundaries are limitless. Similarly, in a family tightening the reins of liberty to a certain extent is acceptable but establishing a threshold, a boundary for the members becomes a problem sometimes. Just like an ocean cannot be restricted in a boundary similarly lives of people cannot be, else there is bound to be an eruption. Gliding smoothly be it on a water body or in real life becomes both important and monotonous given to the turbulences and to the rules bereft of any adventure. Leading children by the hand makes them crippled. Dictating one's life makes it difficult for one to breathe and in turn makes him/her more rebellious. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* becomes rebellious in defiance of norms set by her mother who becomes the mouthpiece of patriarchy. Usha in *Hell Heaven* finds her mother hostile as she too laid rules for her to abide by. It is only when she treats her as more of a friend than a daughter that she opens up and reveals her secrets to her.

Also one gets a glimpse of objectivity and subjectivity in relations in a family that lend a new dimension to lives of characters as it is in real life. It is in extended relations that one finds oneself more at ease than in culturally sanctioned familial ones. Virmati is more at ease with Shakuntla her extended family and Swarna Lata her friend in Lahore whom she accepts as her extended family in whose company she gets her child aborted without anyone from her immediate family being around. Amit discloses the aloofness in his marital relationship to a stranger Felicia in *A Choice of Accommodations* rather than talking it out with his wife Megan. The emotional bonding in immediate family makes one feel in a flux many a times and tries and finds ways to escape and drift away. Imprisoned within the traditional familial domain women are often afraid of listening to their inner voices which they lock in some remote corner to which only the mothers have access to. Culturally constructed femininity dreads confronting these intimate personal forces that represent an urge to escape into freedom. In *Difficult Daughters* Virmati finds education a means to escape her responsibilities as a daughter and a sister, means to escape the constant remarks of her mother.

The study brings forth that Manju Kapur is a 'feminist' writer whereas Jhumpa Lahiri is a 'feminine' writer in the sense that Kapur's writing has a strong political content that challenges patriarchal institutions and behavioural patterns while such critique of patriarchal institutions is rather muted in Jhumpa Lahiri's writings which primarily focus on the feminine world. Manju Kapur talks of women's body, locations, and their psyche as she highlights the plight of her female characters, whereas Lahiri doesn't talk much about gender politics but focuses on conflict of generations and tensions in human relationships. Manju Kapur's women are found in confined places like kitchen, the dressing room, or the attic where Virmati was locked whereas Lahiri's women are placed in open spaces with all exposure but still they meet the same fate. Family has stood the test of time because of women playing the role of an anchor. Family and relations are integral to both. Compatibility and certain harmony is required among family members and both writers hint at the room for that compatibility with members especially women given their space and the opportunity to be themselves, have their own voice. Lahiri and Manju do not outrightly deny the hope of harmony in family by expounding on the notions of relations and family in their respective works.

Since 1960s many prominent Indian Women Writers both in vernacular and in English literature have created space for themselves. These women's voices are not only heard but their thematic concerns and artistic achievements are often discussed and appreciated. However, there is still a great need for deeper thematic and aesthetic studies of women's writing to highlight their social critiques and cultural contributions. The present study was one such attempt. There is a need to juxtapose different vernacular fictions by women along with writing's in English to create a detailed canon of Indian Women's literary writings. This requires translations of vernacular literatures into other vernacular languages as well as into English that would make a pan-Indian women's literature and would contribute to an assertion of women's perspective on various issues concerning social and patriarchal institutions like family and marriage.

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