SUBALTERNITY AND REPRESENTATION:
A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE OF DIVORCE IN
THE SELECTED NOVELS (1990-2007)

By
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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: Subalternity and Representation: A Feminist Analysis of the Issue of Divorce in the Selected Novels (1990-2007)

For Spivak, the idea of subalternity as encapsulated in “Can the Subaltern Speak”? (1994)- is a complex definition, encompassing the way concrete historical locations, social relations as well as political structures interconnect to consolidate subordination of a particular group or people. In terms of the representational neglect of divorce in contemporary literary studies, utilizing Spivak’s concept of subalternity has meant that women, along with many other subaltern groups have long had their experiences being denigrated and excluded in favour of the masculinised knowledge of the discipline. As a consequence, despite the prevalence of divorce as a theme in the contemporary Indian/Pakistani women's fiction, critical exploration of the issue of divorce within postcolonial literary criticism has been slightly considered. This study offers a feminist analysis of the divorce experience of the female protagonists in five postcolonial novels, which include: The God of Small Things, Ancient Promises, Sister of My Heart, My Feudal Lord and Typhoon. This study draws upon Stuart Hall’s idea of representation as an ideologically inscribed process for investigating the context and its relevance with the theme of divorce in the selected texts. It highlights that divorce is an experience, which is meticulously constituted in time and space, and when coupled with the gendered identity of a female protagonist render her marginal. The divorced woman is peripherized by the mechanisms of patriarchal ideology which surrounds the institution of divorce and places her to a subaltern position in comparison to her male counterpart.
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DEDICATION

In living memory of Dr. Saeeda Asadullah Khan, who is no more in this world to see my completed dissertation to which she has made such a valuable contribution and the outcome of which she was looking forward to. I feel honored to be her last student to get a PhD under her precious supervision. I will miss her all my life, but I will also have her present in my work and memory until the moment I will join her.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Marriage has played a significant role in the civilized world, both symbolically and literally. About three centuries back, dissolution of a marriage in most of the civilized states was not permissible and had been regarded as inherently debauched. In the countries where Roman Catholic Church ruled, divorce was legalized only in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was only in 1792 when France permitted divorce, however, later when Napoleon framed the world famous charter of Code Civil des Francais in 1804, divorcé was once again banned in the country. Till 1909, English law also held conservative divorce legislation. In essence, towards the middle thirties of the nineteenth century, feminist movements in the West created a great social change with the move towards the current liberal divorce law.

Unlike the majority of the westernized states, however, even today marriage retains its overarching importance in the social-cultural milieu of India and Pakistan. Although, no uniform system of divorce law prevails in both these countries since the system of laws followed there, are related to the religions professed by the individuals or groups concerned like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism etc. However, despite the geo-religious variations within the two countries, they share a certain legislative similarity in matters most noticeably related to the personal life of a citizen (marriage, divorce and polygamy) and are generally permeated by the patriarchal system.

Typically, the domestic politics of Indian/Pakistani society revolve around the institutions of family and marriage. Girls whether they are Muslims or Hindus are trained to become sisters,
daughter, wives, daughter-in-laws, in fact, to perform all the roles in family relations except that of a divorcee. Practically, within Indian and Pakistani society patriarchal system is prevalent. Patriarchal system invests power in men and marginalizes women. Within this system, male members of the family dominate the family and social life. While both sexes suffer due to the deeply restrained gender roles, a woman customarily remains at a disadvantage. It is not to suggest that every individual member of society yields obedience to patriarchal ideology, or that every woman is a victim. Overall, this system of patriarchy bestows more mobility, more independence and power on men as compared to women. Generally, a woman’s significance lies in her relationship with the male—which may be her father, spouse or any other male custodian. Given the importance of a male protection to survive the social setup, for a woman divorce is pejorative: there are typically negative stereotypes that this word accompanies.

In India, Hindu religion does not permit divorce, however, Hindu civil code of 1955 does allow divorce under certain circumstances.¹ Among Hindus marriage is a sacrament and once it takes place, it’s considered to be irrevocable. Marriage is seen as essential for the manifestation of sexuality, reproduction, and persistence of the family line. A study of Hindu religious books reveals the fact that marriage has been regarded as an extremely sacred relationship and the responsibility of maintaining this relationship is ideologically taken as a sole responsibility of a woman. Even if a woman feels unhappy and undergoes severe marital oppression, she is discouraged to leave her husband. Marriage considered as a lifelong, permanent and indissoluble union, makes divorce a stigmatic choice for a woman. The presence of the patriarchal mindset holds greater social condemnation for divorced woman as compared to her male counterpart. For women the ideological code is stricter: since they are primarily expected to be wives. In case of

¹ Hindu Civil code of 1955 ( also called Hindu Marriage Act of 1955) emerged as legal category after the independence of India. In sharp contrast to the religious conservatism of Hinduism, it is developed round the democratice priciples of gender equality and equity and confers divorce right upon Hindu men and women. See Appendix for the details of divorce provisions under this Act.
the failure of marital relationship, the spatial destability of women becomes severely problematic for them. The religious literature on the issue of marriage almost unanimously stresses women’s allegiances, dedication and commitment to be first and foremost to the marriage. Manu, the greatest lawgiver of ancient India has categorically denied every right of independence to a woman. He says, “in childhood must a female be dependent on her father, in youth on her husband, her lord being dead on her sons; a woman must never seek independence” (cited in Misla, 2013, p. 9). Similarly, in his book on the Religions of India, Professor Hopkins puts the case against women as follows: “a woman’s husband is said to be a venerated god, even he be devoid of any virtue; he is the only centre round which the thoughts of the chaste wife must be woven, he is the warp and woof of her life, all in all”(cited in Misla, 2013, p. 33). About Hindu women, Misla (2013) highlights Manu’s prejudice in interpreting the Hindu Law, which is full of hostile expressions for them; he completely subjugates and subordinates women to the will of their husbands. An unconditional and categorical dependency which Manu expects from a woman is that “during her childhood a woman depends on her father, during her youth on her husband, her husband being dead, on her sons, if she has no sons, on the near relatives of her husband, or in default of them, on those of her father, if she has no paternal relations” (Milsa, 2013, p. 51).

Due to the prevalence of an idealistic approach towards the marriage contract, till today Indian society accepts divorce with reluctance. Joyati Puri (1999), in Woman, Body, and Desire in Post-colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality, screens the complex and multiple challenges that an Indian woman faces with divorce:

In our society, there is a grave dearth of options for a woman who leaves her husband’s home; however, apart from such objective factors are the psychological and subconscious holds of female conditioning through mythological stories and cultural norms that define a woman as not only belonging to her husband but as not having an autonomous self that
can make a life outside of a marital sphere. The consequences for stepping outside the boundaries established by the cultural code of *pativarta* (literally translated: husband as a god), can be severe as in the woman’s ostracization in overt and subtle ways. Often, her parents, her only refuge, encourage a married daughter to put up with physical and emotional abuse, until sadly; she might pay the ultimate price of her life. (p. 38)

The ideology of ‘*pativarta*’ also makes it hard for a woman to desert her husband—a belief advocated by the Hindu notion of destiny. Research on the position of Indian females points out that majority of divorced women encounter great financial and social problems for themselves and their children. A divorcee with kids usually requires the support of a male relative and faces multiple social challenges and economic tensions. In most cases, divorce creates a challenging social condition for a divorced woman who is no longer under the rule of her husband. After losing her marital house usually she makes an unwelcome entry into her parents’ house. (Das 1999)

In Pakistan, marriage is a contract and consequently divorce is permissible according to Shariat Law. Islam as a religion of majority in the country has also reinforced the importance of marriage as central to the family organization of a Muslim society. It is acknowledged as a contract and not a sacrament in Islam. This fact is confirmed by a large number of Quranic verses and hadith dealing with the issue of marriage.² Endorsed and permitted by Islam, complete and thorough understanding of the true Islamic principles reveals that Islam has very wisely tackled the issue of divorce in comparison to other religions of the area. In accepting the frailties and fluctuations of human nature, Islam recognizes an individual’s right to divorce. However, this permission is given with reluctance. Dissolution of marriage is allowed as a matter of necessity

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² The most widely cited Quranic verses on this topic are 2:31, 2:28, 2:29, 24:8-9, 4:35, 33:49. Details are given in the Appendix.
to avert greater evil, which may result from the continuance of an unhappy partnership. For it is better to dissolve a relationship where the concerned parties, live together in continued hostility towards each other. Some critics have challenged the Islamic law of divorce on the ground that it encourages its frequency. There is a general misconception that the right to divorce exclusively rests with a Muslim male. Their arguments are majorly premised on the assumption that a Muslim woman is typically at a disadvantage since her husband may divorce her on his will at any point in time. They challenge the absence of any limitation on the power of the husband to divorce the wife. To this Das (1999) says “the system of dower, that is to say the promise which a husband makes at the time of the marriage to pay to his wife an amount of money consistent with the status of the parties, discourages unilateral decision on his part to divorce his wife, for upon a divorce being effected the amount has to be paid” (p. 6-7). She holds such notions as fallacious. The fact is that a Muslim woman can both demand a divorce from her husband and be divorced. At the time of signing the marriage contract, Islamic law entitles a wife to retain her right to divorce. Moreover, the marriage contract can also be terminated by the mutual consent of both the husband and wife. Under Islamic custom, this provision is known as Mubaraat. A Mubaraat, divorce, like Khula, is a dissolution of marriage by agreement, but there is difference between the origin of two. When the aversion is on the part of the wife and she desires a separation, the transaction is called ‘Khula’. When the aversion is mutual and both sides desire a separation, the transaction is called ‘Mubaraat’. In either case, the dissolution is complete for all legal purposes.

Among Muslim community in Pakistan, marriage like any other civil contract can be dissolved under extreme circumstances. However, the general community does not favour divorce. This social reluctance to accept divorce has to do with the fact that, “the Pakistani society in practice, particularly in matters relating to woman’s marriage and allied subjects

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3Details of the circumstances and conditions under which Muslim marriages can be terminated are listed in the Appendix.
accepts the Indian custom, rites and rituals, which do not have even the remotest connection with the Islamic ideology” (Patel 2003, p. 33). In theory, the Muslims of Pakistan accept all the basics of Islam including all the conventions relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance and polygamy. Practically, their devotion to the ideals of Islam is selective. On the issues concerning woman’s marriage and related affairs, they accept the patriarchal customs and traditions that are not in keeping with the true spirit of Islam. Although the practices vary from place to place, but the common thing among them is that they all are the product of a nonreligious approach towards marriage matters. Prolonged and extravagant ceremonies begin weeks before marriage and continue months after the ceremony. Being celebrated with religious reverence, however, they have nothing Islamic about them. As Patel (2003) says: “there are so many traditional rituals being performed that the bride and her family have little awareness of the contractual nature of marriage and possible rights and obligations which can be included in the marriage contract” (p. 5). Further, Rashida Patel (2003) analysing the patriarchal system of the country contends, “women are the poorest of the poor and the most oppressed of the oppressed. A great majority of Pakistani women is controlled and dependent upon their men: playing the role of daughter, wife, mother, and sister under severe family constraints” (p. 22). Social taboos and lack of family support leave women with little possibility to survive outside the marital bond.

Tracing the influence of Hindu laws and concepts during the pre-partitioned period of Muslim family life, Patel (2003) posits that the marginal position of a divorced woman in Pakistan is ingrained in the Hindu religious concept of the ‘Sati’, which symbolizes the end of a woman’s life after the death of her husband. Patel further speculates, “stigma to divorce by the wife is deep-rooted, stemming as it does from years of custom, tradition and law. Even today, there is a stigma attached to divorce, which makes it difficult for a wife to demand a divorce from

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4 For a comparative analysis of Hindu and Muslim divorce law, see the concluding segment of the Appendix.
her husband either out of court or through legal processes” (p. 90). As compared to the absolute ease for a man to divorce his wife and to remarry, divorce for a woman becomes an awful and often a piercing reality. For a divorced female raising her children alone becomes her biggest problem. Moreover, her chances to remarry get lower along with the children from her previous marriage. Typically, a divorced woman faces severe constraints in actualizing her rights of dower, dowry, maintenance, the custody of her minor children or her lawful share in the joint property. (Das 1999) Ideologically, divorce is the proof of a woman’s incompetence as an obedient wife-the belief which mostly blames a woman for her marriage failure.

1.2 Background of the Study

For the post colonial discourse (the ideology within which divorce operates) rather than presenting divorce as a means of liberation for the troubled female protagonists, women novelists have mainly presented it as a complex process; divorce challenges their freedom, stability and sense of security. All the five novelists selected for the present study, including Arundhati Roy (1997), Jaishree Misra (2000), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1999), Tehmina Durrani (1994) and Qaisra Shahraz (2003), have shown divorce as an oppressive alternative for their troubled female protagonists. They have portrayed only two destinies for their female divorcees- i.e death or travel to the West. Of the selected novels- The God of Small Things (1997), Sister of My Heart (1997), and Ancient Promises (2000) are set in India where culturally, religiously and socially divorce is treated as a taboo topic. Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things (1994) explores the exploitation of a divorced woman who lives in Kerala. Ancient Promises (2000) is set Delhi (which is the capital of India) and Kerala, whereas Sister of My Heart (1999) is set in Calcutta, again a famous city of India.
Two of the selected novels- *My Feudal Lord (1994)* and *Typhoon (2003)* are written by Pakistani novelists and are set in major cities of Pakistan. *The God of Small Things (1997)* portrays three divorced characters- Ammu, her brother Chacko and daughter Rahel. *Ancient Promises (2000)* revolve around the married life and subsequent divorce of Janu, because of her handicapped young daughter. *My Feudal Lord (1994)* is based on the life story of Tehmina, her violent marriage ended in divorce with the loss of her financial stability and custody of her four children, as well as complete alienation from her parents and friends. *Typhoon (2003)* is the account of the enforced divorce of a blameless couple, Naghmana and Haroon, under the pressure of a village-head in a village *kacheri*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Sister of my Heart (1999)* narrates the distressed marital breakup of her female protagonist, Sudha, who encountered divorce after her refusal to abort her baby daughter.

In terms of the current study, it is worth examining how postcolonial women novelists have used divorce both thematically and formally. The present study is motivated by the desire to trace the representative failure of divorce in mainstream literary studies. It explores the way divorce, as an important literary theme has been pushed to the periphery of the contemporary criticism. The study will develop this argument by concentrating on the dual dimensions of representation, i.e. content and form of divorce discourse. This research in its devoted attention to the politics of space will demonstrate how space processes the divorce experience for a woman and the ways in which her elimination from the house of marriage activates multiple exclusions and restrictions in her life. This research will also try to trace the reasons for the contemporary aversion towards the use of realist narrative mode of fiction. Subsequently, through an analysis of the use of realist conventions in the selected novels, this research will clarify that the use of realist modality is inevitable for the theme of divorce for this issue carries material, domestic and social consequences.
1.3 Rationale of the study

The title of the study holds great pertinence in terms of explaining the theoretical moves which the study takes to analyse the positions, conditions and structures that constitute the representation of divorce within the selected narratives. This study makes use of the term ‘feminist analysis’ to suggest a study which is predominantly concerned with the divorce experience of women. Besides, the study also employs a feminist perspective to examine the complexities of gender which impact a woman’s divorce experience. Theoretically, the term ‘feminist’ has varied meanings and does not represent a cohesive or a monolithic frame of analysis. However, to address women's issues, problems and need are central to all the varieties of feminist approaches towards a social phenomenon. Both theoretically and historically, feminist theory has evolved as a challenge to patriarchy. Therefore, an understanding of patriarchy is central to a feminist analysis of an experience. Today, feminist analysis holds a multiplicity of approaches that denies any understanding or definition of patriarchy as a monolithic discourse.

Broadly, it can be identified as an ideology that privileges men in domestic, cultural and political circles of a social life and as an effect put women in disadvantaged positions. Critics of the concept treat patriarchy as an elastic concept that covers hidden operations of ideology to more covert processes manifested in the cultural beliefs, attitudes and values of a society. Allan G. Johnson in her essay “Patriarchy the System: An it, Not a He, a Them, or an Us” (2000) looks at the issues of power, dominance, and control as central to patriarchal ideology which exist only through people’s life. Johnson (2000) says:

Through this, patriarchy’s various aspects are there for us to see over and over again. This has two important implications for how we understand patriarchy. First, to some extent people experience patriarchy as external to them; but this doesn’t mean that it’s a distinct and separate thing, like a house in which we live. Instead, by participating in
patriarchy we are by patriarchy and it is of us. Both exist through the other and neither can exist without the other. Second patriarchy isn’t static; it’s an ongoing process that’s continually shaped and reshaped.

This statement suggests patriarchy as a social construct which adopts different forms in different contexts. This entails that although the shared biological experiences of women, including menstruation, pregnancies, mothering, and childbirth give rise to similarities that affect women all around the world, however, the shapes and specifics of these experiences vary according to the cultural locations where they live. This is to suggest that as patriarchy is open to a variety of forms, thereby, many varieties of feminist theory have developed to address the issues faced by women in diverse geographical and cultural locations.

Therefore, to escape the generalized and the essentialist idea of divorce as a social issue, the present study in its feminist analysis incorporates the postcolonial framework to conceptualize the social, cultural, political and psychological operations of patriarchal ideology that form the background of the selected novels. In contemporary usage, the idea of post-colonialism has been used both in the literal and metaphorical senses. Literally, it suggests a period following the direct colonial occupation and rule in different countries of the world. Metaphorically speaking, it suggests a framework that questions power inequalities, structural hierarchies, hegemonic tendencies and the effects of colonial legacy within colonial context. In her essay “Post-colonial Feminist Theory” (1998), Sara Mills lists the issues and debase central to postcolonial theory:

Postcolonial theorists consider that there were wide a range of different colonial and imperial relations during the nineteenth century, which still have a major effect on the way that cultures see themselves. It is this concern with the present-day legacy of imperialism, which is the fundamental focus of post-colonial theory. Whilst postcolonial
theory covers a wide range of theoretical concerns, it is broadly focused not only on the analysis of economic and political structures, but also on the examination of the development of particular structures of thinking and behaviour.

Mills’ definition reveals a number of similarities in the theoretical debates that concern postcolonial and feminist critics. A postcolonial critique of colonialist ideology is analogous to the feminist appraisal of patriarchal ideology in terms of achieving personal, economic and political powers. This study makes use of the term ‘postcolonial theory’ to suggest a theoretical framework within which selected novels can be analysed against the grain of patriarchal discourse in a postcolonial context. It suggests a recognition, resistance and challenge to the strictures and structures of patriarchal relations of power.

The title of the study juxtaposes two major terms ‘subalternity’ and ‘representation’ for dual purposes. Firstly, such an arrangement suggests its engagement of feminist analysis with postcolonial debates of representation and subalternity. Secondly, the placement of the term ‘subalternity’ prior to ‘representation’ recognizes the representational crisis of the indigenous women both within the dominant discourses of feminist and postcolonial theory. The concept of representation which is worked within the study is drawn from Stuart Hall’s constructionist approach to representation, a position that acknowledges that truth is always relative to the context in which it is produced- something that is specific to a particular time, place and person. Therefore, in this study the issue of representation is not suggested as a mimetic reproduction of reality, but as a subjective process, generating sense in relation to its socio-historic context, a material reality rooted in the point of view of particular knowledge producers. Such an approach to representation implies the complex web of processes by which the divorce experience is constituted in these novels in response to a variety of ideological imperatives. This leads to the
examination of divorce event attending to the processes, participants, and circumstances that present the experience of divorce as a multiply determined condition in the selected texts.

Within the postcolonial context, feminist theorists contest the gendered dynamics of the politics of representation framed by their subaltern location in the paradigm. The concept of representation holds significant position in postcolonial feminist theory as it builds upon the relationship between meaning and the context. Sara Mills in her essay “Postcolonial Feminist Theory” (1994) suggests that the postcolonial feminist project can be described as one of interrupting the discourses of postcolonial theory and liberal Western feminism, while simultaneously refusing the singular “Third-World-Woman” as the object of study. She maintains that the power relations under which representations are constructed and deployed are recurrently the focus of attention in feminist analysis. She critically argues that the centrality of representation within postcolonial feminist debates negates the essentialist idea of woman as the subject of feminism, but rather implies woman within the social context as a category of feminist analysis. Mills (1994) elaborates the agenda of postcolonial feminist theory as: “post-colonial feminist theory has begun to be established as a form of analysis in its own right; rather than simply being seen as a critique of Western feminism or post-colonial theory, it has developed both a position from which to speak, and a set of issues to be addressed”. Therefore, postcolonial feminist theory poses an elemental challenge to male supremacy in postcolonial studies and a resistance to the essentializing tendencies within mainstream feminist theory, most principally developed in the works of Gayatri Spivak, Sara Mills, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Anne McClintock.

Aside from, the parallels between the feminist and postcolonial theorists, the idea of ‘subalternity’ as exploited in the title of the study accentuates the belief of double oppression faced by postcolonial women. Literally, the term subaltern refers to the “noncommissioned
military troops who are subordinate to the authority of lieutenants, colonels, and generals” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995 p. 33), and figuratively denotes low status or marginal existence. An Italian thinker, Antonio Gramsci was first to introduce the term ‘subaltern’ within the intellectual and political currents in the late 1930s. He used it with reference to the ‘groups or classes’ who were socially inferior and held no ideological agency. Gramsci’s major intention behind using the less popular term ‘subaltern’ instead of ‘proletarian’ for the dispossessed lot had been to escape the censorship of his writings by the prison authorities. However, the word soon gained common currency to categorize less privileged working-classes such as peasants and farm labourers of the society.

Within postcolonial debates, a subaltern can be an individual or a group rendered marginal by the dominant material relationships and is subject to the hegemony of a more powerful group. Early postcolonial paradigm assumed a universal male subject and criticized most of the postcolonial work written from masculinist perspective. This literary monopoly created a hostile atmosphere where the work created by female writers and the issues which concerned women failed to find any meaningful representation. This literary denial has remained the major concern of feminist theorists of the postcolonial world. Most noticeably, in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994) Gayatri Spivak claims: “As the object of colonialist historiography and as the subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow”. Spivaks’ idea of postcolonial woman as a subaltern “more deeply in shadow” has generated great debates in literary circles over the autonomy of postcolonial women. In her study, she draws attention to the need of analysing issues, concepts, texts, and behaviour of postcolonial women within their historical context. The reason identified by Spivak in claiming subalternity for the postcolonial women is that they are victimized by both colonialist ideology (that marginalizes women because of their
cultural and racial identity) and patriarchal ideology (that oppresses women because of their gendered identity).

Spivak’s work of the subaltern woman has meaningfully privileged the study to consider the interplay of socio-cultural and historical contexts of the female protagonists who experience divorce in the selected postcolonial texts. The issues, beliefs, and practices evident in the representation of divorced women in these novels reveal features of the dominant ideology of divorce, which are discernable in the postcolonial society of India/Pakistan, and are promoted at the level of thought and practice. The study of divorce in this way, has been divided in three analytical chapters to examine the principal sites of representation: mode of representation (which involves consideration of the texts’ narrative operations and what do they reveal about the culture from which they emerged), space of representation (which focuses on the image of the house to contextualize the specific material/historical practices and circumstances under which divorce occurs and is experienced), and representation of the gendered subaltern (which consequently draws attention to the limitations of divorce and to pathways of resistance and societal change). Thus, the study in its analysis of the three dominant sites of representation reveals three core features that are concluded as fundamental to the depiction of divorce in the selected novels; the reality/actuality of divorce issue in the postcolonial society, the interpolation of space in the formation of divorce experience, and the prevalent patriarchal ideology that shapes both the constraining and empowering potentials of divorce for a female.

For the most part, this study will argue that the oppression of divorced women takes different forms and degrees. Therefore essentializing their condition of subordination necessarily risks the diversity and multiplicity of their racial, regional, generational, experiential and ethnic identities. For this reason, instead of using the general term of subordination, the study works with the idea of subalternity to highlight that the oppression divorce woman faces not merely as
the result of a divorce incident in itself but its interconnection with her contextual identity. This approach is in harmony with the aim of this study, which is not to expose an objective truth behind the representation of divorce in these novels, rather to clarify how and why divorced female characters are represented as subaltern, and the way their marginality is discursively constituted and manifested within the texts. Nevertheless, working with the idea of ‘representation’ in the given sense also claims that these texts allow some sense of access to reality as it might have been experienced by the female divorcees in Indian/Pakistani society.

The range of research throughout the study has been kept broad and extensive. An intensive research of a this issue may produce more knowledge, but it would portray only a partial picture of the total reality. Extensive research on the other hand is more integrated and tends to depict all the possible theoretical and practical contours of the issue. It is with this objective that the domain of analysis has been kept extensive within the study so that the marginal status of a divorced woman can be understood in the light of the total picture of the postcolonial society. Problems and issues relating to divorced women in countries under study have been examined to identify the real causes which keeps divorced women at a low position in the socio-economic framework of the postcolonial society.

1.4 The Research Questions:

1. What are the politics of the narrative configurations, and how do those politics promote and undermine the idea of divorce as a gendered category in the selected novels?

2. How do spatial politics challenge or intensify unequal relationships of power that affect the status and identity of a divorced woman?
3. How do the narrative closures illustrate the problematics of divorce and the gendered subalternity of a divorced woman?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

Mirroring the complexities of social and structural inequalities in India/Pakistan, the fiction written by the postcolonial female novelists exemplifies a mode of writing responsive to the gender hierarchies and other issues related to women. Women are exposed to physical, social and psychological oppressions in the patriarchal postcolonial society. While women’s writings appear to have a critical dimension to them, the issue of divorce is the recurring theme in the novels written by female novelists of the subcontinent. Divorce thus becomes a way of interrogating the kinds of subordinations and discriminations that frame the subaltern identity of a divorced female subject within the postcolonial fiction. Focusing on the divorce experience of the female protagonists within the selected narratives, the key objectives of the present study are:

- to identify how divorce as a prominent fictional theme has failed to draw significant attention of the feminist and postcolonial theorists
- to explore the impact of historical, social and geographical specificities on the representation of divorce experience in the selected novels
- to highlight the role of gender inequalities, structural hierarchies and ideological biases in perpetuating the marginality of a divorced woman
- to evaluate the effect of the patriarchal system on the limited representation of divorced women in fiction
- to provide insights about the cultural ideologies of Indian/Pakistani society which establish divorce as a taboo topic and a stigmatic choice for a female
to contribute the tradition of divorce discourse to the postcolonial feminist literary criticism by pointing out similarities and shared patterns in the narration of divorce stories of five different Indian/Pakistani novelists.

1.6 Research Strategy

This study is descriptive and exploratory in nature and recognizes the difference between divorce as an experience and as an institution. Academic journals, articles, books and websites are used to develop the background and the critique of patriarchal ideology in order to contextualize the marginality of a divorced woman.

1.7 Working Definitions

To explore the relationship of a text with its socio-ideological contexts in its construction of an experience, it is indispensable to explain the key terms that recur in the study to avoid theoretical complexities. However, in producing the working definitions of the terms, the study resists totalizing or catchall ideas and develops only provisional and contextualized meanings which are generated in response to the arguments developed in the thesis.

1.7.1 Representation

The concept of representation is drawn from Stuart Hall’s constructionist approach to representation, a position that acknowledges that truth is always relative to the context in which it is produced—something that is specific to a particular time, place and person. Therefore, in this study the issue of representation is not suggested as a mimetic reproduction of reality, but as a subjective process, creating sense in relation to its socio-historic context, a material reality rooted in the point of view of particular knowledge producers. Therefore, representation implies the complex web of processes by which the divorce experience of the female protagonists is
constituted in these novels in response to a variety of ideological imperatives. This leads to the examination of divorce event attending to the processes, participants, and circumstances that present the subalternity of divorced female protagonists as a multiply determined condition in the selected texts. This approach is in harmony with the aim of this study, which is not to expose an objective truth behind the representation of divorce in these novels, rather to clarify how and why divorced female characters are represented as subaltern, and the way their marginality is discursively constituted and manifested within the texts. Nevertheless, working with the idea of ‘representation’ in the given sense also claims that these texts allow some sense of access to reality as it might have been experienced by the female divorcees in Indian/Pakistani society.

1.7.2 Feminist Analysis

Feminist theory does not represent a cohesive or monolithic category that encapsulates a consistent analytical framework. There are many varieties of feminism and many ways of being feminist. The very usage of the term ‘feminist’ analysis is continually being debated. Although, the term has varied meanings, addressing women’s issues and needs in diverse places, times and settings are central to all. This study makes use of the term ‘feminist analysis’ to suggest a study which is predominantly concerned with the divorce experience of women and where patriarchy serves as a fundamental category for the exploration of the practices and ideologies that construct the identity and status of a divorced woman. This claim is pertinent in the context of providing an understanding of women’s divorce experience as they come across it, examined in the light of feminist perspectives of gender relations.

1.7.3 Subalternity

The centrality of subalternity to the analysis of divorce experience within the suggested postcolonial context is critical of the totalizing tendency of the shared and equal degrees of oppression. Subalternity is not a stable position of subordination rather it is taken as a discursive
construct. The use of the term ‘subalternity’ as an effect of the discourse allows analysing both commonality as well as the difference between the divorce experiences of different female characters. This very broad definition implicates a rethinking of the nature and meaning of subordination in opposition to the essential notions of oppressor and oppressed. It helps to concentrate on those complex mechanisms of the social strata through which divorced women experience their oppression.

Focusing on female characters as the experiential centre of the divorce, the primary aim of using the term ‘subalternity’ is to reveal the complex interplay of multiple forms of subordination in the formation of a divorce experience. Subalternity suggests the subordination of women with an eye toward its intersections with other markers of identity, for instance age, family, class, race, religion and sexuality in all its depth and specificity. Furthermore, as an approach subalternity is conceived as ascribed, fluid and variably positioned with a possibility that although divorced women face many difficulties, they can fight against their subordinate social positions.

1.7.4 Patriarchy

The issue of patriarchy is a prominent and a recurring theme in the selected literature. The selected novelists have scrutinized the misogyny of patriarchal barriers and cultural mores as a major impediment to the emancipation and empowerment of women after divorce. The usage of the word ‘patriarchy’ tends to foreclose accurate definition considering the multifarious constitution of a feminist approach. In its wider sense, patriarchy is not a monolithic force, but an agentic marker of socio-psychological processes that celebrates the supremacy of male power in public and private relationships. It does not suggest that women are either totally powerless or deprived of the privileges that male members of the society enjoy, but rather implies all those issues of authority, power and dominance which are involved in every social relationship and
which place high value on male superiority. In order to survive the patriarchal system, both male and female sections of the society internalize its rules that regulate their lives and follow all that is expected and desired. In this sense, focusing on patriarchy means more than the values, practices, rules and patterns of the social order, but with the way personal and community life of a female is shaped in relation to them.

1.8 Delimitations

The title of the study is: Subalternity and Representation: A Feminist Analysis of the Issue of Divorce in the selected Novels (1990-2007). Due to the constraints of time and length of the thesis, only five novels are selected for the present study. Following novels written by Indian/Pakistani women novelists are the selection of the research:

- Qaisra Shiraz’s *Typhoon* (2003). This novel is the sequel to Shahraz’s novel *The Holy Woman*

In its research on the issue of divorce, all the five novels selected for the study are written by women novelists. These novels illustrate the way divorce as an institution and as an experience affect the lives of women within the specific socio-cultural context. Elaine Showalter’s statement that she makes in *A literature of Their Own* (1977), makes it possible to think about studying women novelists as a group in their own right. A study of female novelists is often criticized for providing an unbalanced picture of the world. To this belief, it would be argued that within the study male theorists have also extensively been quoted, both post-colonial as well as
Western, to ensure that this study does not create an unbalanced picture of the issue under scrutiny. Certainly, for all their resemblances, these novelists are not identical in their approach towards divorce. Since their narrative endings for the divorced woman differ from each other, this gives a further basis to be grouped together. Within the thesis, excluding the study of divorced male characters is also a conscious choice; firstly for the practical reason of space, and secondly, because the study does not want to establish even unconsciously a binary male-female framework. They are considered to the extent to which their actions and conduct affect the lives of their female counterparts. Consequently, the restrictions and limitations that shape the identities of divorced female characters might be relevant to male characters too, but that argument is excluded from the present study.

The five novels together encompass an extensive body of work and cover a period of seven years from 1990 to 2007. The study demonstrates certain trends and identifies the persistence of repeated issues in the fiction of the time. These women novelists have mainly dealt with the key issues and conflicts that their female characters face before, during and after their marriages end. Studying these texts as a body of work identifies certain repeated patterns, although there is not necessarily a sequential development or progression about them. While they do not replicate each other, they complement one another through complementary discursive organizations. Their narration details the social desirability of marital stability, challenges of marital distress, the trauma of marital breakup and the issues of location, dislocation and relocation for a female protagonist. They narrate how divorce is incapable of helping troubled women as they live under rigid patriarchal culture.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This study is divided into six chapters organized according to the major arguments developed in the study:
The first chapter offers a brief introduction of the historical and current socio-political realities within which the contemporary postcolonial women novelists have set their stories. Chapter Two encompasses literature review to lay the theoretical framework for a critical examination of the issues of representation, subalternity, post-colonialism, space and form from a postcolonial feminist perspective. This chapter provides the antecedents of various issues and problems relating to the status of divorced women and crystallizes the dilemma of the representative failure of divorce as an important theme in contemporary literary studies.

Chapter three is titled as “Mode of Representation: Realism, Narration and Divorce Discourse”. Realizing that meaning is necessarily communicated through form, this chapter explores different narrative forms and techniques used by women novelists to constitute the divorce experience of their female protagonists. This analytical approach, thereby enables to find certain norms, tendencies, and patterns that the selected novels share in their articulation of divorce discourse and the specific rationalities behind them.

Chapter four with the title “Space of Representation: Divorce in the House of Fiction” focuses mainly on the image of the house. The idea of the title “Divorce in the House of Fiction” is drawn, partially from the study of Geetanjali Chanda (1998), who has done a comprehensive research on the image of the house in post-colonial feminist fiction. Female novelists underscore the ways in which space constructs subaltern identities. Each of the five novels has narrated the space of both the parental and marital houses, particularly as they are experienced by the divorced female characters. This chapter analyses the influence and significance of space in the life of women and focuses on the image of the house as a socially lived space. This focus on the domestic space allows for studying the social behaviour, for an Eastern family is regarded as the microcosm of the culture. Both parental and marital homes are examined and evaluated in this chapter that help to explain the unhappy endings of these novels for their divorced female
protagonists. This chapter provides the antecedents of spatial ethos concerning the position of women and crystallizes the constraints from which they suffer after divorce.

Chapter five titled as “Representation of the Subaltern: Divorce, Dislocation and Death” examines the unhappy endings of these novels for their divorced female protagonists. Analysis of the narrative closures provides a mechanism, which clarifies an understanding of the way divorced woman internalize their subjugation to the power of the dominant social group. This analysis exemplifies specific trends and tracks the persistence of particular problems that divorced women face in the novels under study. The defence of patriarchal ideologies is aggravated by the politics of location, since a married woman’s association with domestic space and tradition makes her stepping out as problematic.

Realizing the heterogeneity and diversity of the experiences of divorced female characters within these texts, all these novels have been analysed under separate headings as it saves the study from blurring the particular details of these novels by lumping them together. Each aspect has been studied in its true historical and cultural perspective with the intention to keep the analysis as dispassionate and objective as possible.

Chapter six provides an overall conclusion. The conclusion of the entire study recognizes the subalternity of the divorced female protagonists as a complex phenomenon, which is not simply the consequence of their divorce, nevertheless generated by their gendered subject positions within specific historical and social circumstances. The study concludes that the patriarchal barriers listed by the women novelists serve as major impediments in hampering the empowerment of divorced women. This discussion constitutes the crux of the study, since an experience of divorce is not a discrete incident, but is diffused and interwoven with the discursive operations of the subaltern identity of female characters in the selected postcolonial novels.
Problems and issues faced by divorced women under study have been summarized to highlight the real causes, which make them subaltern within the socio-historical framework of Indian/Pakistani society. In the light of information, thus extracted, broad recommendations have been attempted with a hope that if considered, they can considerably contribute to the postcolonial studies.

A comprehensive bibliography incorporating the references of the material studied and cited in the study has been added. To provide this study with further weight and strength, an appendix which has a direct or indirect bearing on the topic of the study has been added. A stylistic explanation is that within the study the terms and expressions taken from the indigenous languages are put in italics, particularly those originally italicized by the women novelists in their narratives.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Related to Stuart Hall’s (1997) understanding of representation, there are three prevailing approaches to representation: the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist. The reflective approach to representation holds reality lying in an object, person, thought or action and that believes in language as a medium to communicate reality as it exists in the world. Similar to reflective approach, intentional approach assumes language as a private medium to express those realities only, which a writer or an artist intend to construct. Critical of both reflective and the intentional approaches, Hall objects that these two approaches are too reductive in the sense they reduce the complex relationship of power, meaning and knowledge to a simple affair of mimetic or intentional dimension. Hall (1997) confronts both these approaches of representation with a claim that “there is no simple relationship of reflection, imitation or one-to-one correspondence between language and the real world” (p. 24).

Hall works with Foucault’s ideas of discourse, power and knowledge, and the question of the ‘subject’ in his approach to representation. By centering at ‘discourse’ rather than ‘language’ as a medium of communication, Hall (1997) brings social and cultural context into the analytical spotlight and debates that “neither things in themselves, nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language [thus] things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems—concepts and signs” (p.25). Similar to Hall’s propositions, feminist theory is also driven by the rules of constructionist approach to representation as it offers a critical technique to explore the relationship between experience and social power, celebrating the feminist slogan that “personal is political”(Weedon 1987, p. 1).
2.2 Discourses as a Mode of Representation

Contrary to reflective and intentional approaches to representation, Hall (1997) makes discourse (instead of language) as the central category of representation. Earlier, “discourse” was referred to the elucidation of a particular topic in writing or speech. Within linguistics, it signifies a unit of language larger than the sentence, emphasizing at the same time the “communicative competence” of an individual, which enables him to articulate the right word at the right time. Further, a distinction is drawn between langue and parole; Parole is the spoken and written language in use by the individual, whereas, langue is something which is stable and above the actual use of the individual within the range of all community members. Accordingly, discourse is defined as the written or the spoken language, however the difference between parole and discourse is the assumption that institutional and socio-historical practices and ideologies determine the discourse. For Hall (1997) an idea of discourse entails a specific understanding of the social context within which language is used. Therefore, the Saussurean concept of parole as an objective expression of language is different from the Hall’s usage of discourse. This approach rests on the idea that the role of social context is crucial for determining the meaning of utterances, so that it becomes difficult to comprehend linguistic items without considering the context used in discourse.

Within the critical circles, this term owes its popularity for the most part to the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Foucault (1972) in The Archaeology of Knowledge summarizes the agenda for what he calls “the pure description of discursive events” (p. 3). He believes that inevitable links exist among the types of communication, power and knowledge. This institutional nature of discourse is especially noticeable in the work of Hall (1997). In defining discourse, Hall (1997) quotes Foucault’s concept of discourse as:
By ‘discourse’, Foucault meant a ‘group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is the production of knowledge through language. But since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do—our conduct—all practices have a discursive aspect. (p. 291)

Foucault’s perception of “discourse” is clearly a context-based conception of language, an approach advantageous to the development of the contemporary literary research. Related to Foucauldian understanding of discourse, Hall in his study of representation draws a number of implications. What Hall advocates is that meaning is not constituted in a free-floating discourse. A discursive arrangement is a rule directed set of material practices. He suggests that it is unrealistic to exclude the forces of the context (more specifically the culture) which language centres in constructing meaning. For Hall (1997) representation, thus, is a “complex process of constructing meaning in and through language through ‘different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them’” (p. 17). Therefore, rather than focusing more on the meaning of representations, Hall stresses on the vital role that a context plays in which representations are given form, meaning, and eventually positioned. Hall (1997) further elaborates the idea:

It is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others… the meaning depends, not on the material quality of the sign, but on its symbolic function.(p. 25-26)
Hall asserts that the meaning and what is represented don’t operate “out there” prior to the representation. Language does not simply represent, it constructs what it presumes to represent or talk about. Rather than taking representation as a pure ‘linguistic’ category he argues that meaning is constructed by a ‘system of representation’—fixed socially, fixed in culture over time and without conscious choice or decision. Hall (1997) puts it in the following way:

At the heart of the meaning process in culture, then, are two related ‘systems of representation’. The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc... -and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between things, concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call representation. (p. 19)

The main point to get hold of Hall’s study is that if the meaning is the result of our cultural, social and linguistic conventions, then meaning is never finally fixed or stable but is always subject to change. Words constantly go out of usage, and new terms are coined. Thus, this theorizing of representation forces us to see that meaning does not reside in things, in the world rather it is culturally constructed and produced as “the result of a signifying practice—a practice that produces meaning, that makes things mean” (Hall, 1997, p. 24). Hall’s idea of representation counters that there is an ‘absolute truth’, but rather speaks of ‘regimes of truth’, supported by discursive formations, that are made true through ‘discursive practices’. As Foucault notes that things mean something as ‘true’ only within a specific social context:
Truth isn’t outside power. … Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned … the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Cited in Hall, 1997, p. 49)

This leads Hall to unfix the idea of a single, universal ‘true’ meaning, but one that changes in different social contexts and from period to period. Truth is multiple. Indeed, Hall’s idea of representation with its popularity of the term ‘discourse’ helps in legitimizing links between literature and the context of its production.

### 2.2.1 Knowledge/Power

Hall (1997) in his approach to representation emphasizes the interrelationship of power, knowledge and subject to the analysis of discourse. He contends that knowledge cannot be disentangled from the relations of power as it is always being used to normalize social behaviour. The particular object of Hall’s attention is the relation of meaning to the questions of power and insists that representation can never be free from relations of power in its historical specificity and discursive formation. Hall draws on Foucault’s genealogy of power that is divided into two broad categories: bio-power and disciplinary power. Bio-power targets the entire population of the modern state and manages their life processes, which involves the control of matters such as birth, health, death, sexuality and so on. Whereas, disciplinary power suggests micro-level power relations that operates in a capillary style throughout the modern society and monitors, manipulates and controls the human body. Foucault (1977) in his work “Discipline and Punish” explains continuous surveillance as the central mode of disciplinary power — which in the beginning of the human society aimed at disciplining them, takes “hold of the mind as well to
induce a psychological state of conscious and permanent visibility” (p. 201). Accordingly, Foucault substitutes the direct forms of legal constraints and repressions by the subtler operations of the cultural norms as the principal mechanism of social control. Foucault’s belief that language is necessarily context-dependent makes discourse a social text. He argues that knowledge and power are interconnected through a variety of discursive elements and are both constructed and constructive. In keeping with this concept, individual actions are taken to be determined and negotiated by the dominant power relations, and language is the place where these struggles are acted out, as “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces challenges and uncovers it, turning it weak … with in one discourse may exist diverse and dissimilar discourses” (Foucault 1981, p.101). Foucault (1981) defines power as the name of complex conditions in a specific society, highlighted by the dynamics of contrasting circumstances in which persons operate:

It is not a thing to be obtained and/or manipulated; instead, it is the interplay of complex relationships. Nor power is a simple separation of binary relationships into the controller and the controlee; instead, these relationships are a part of other relationships such as economic, knowledge, and sexual relationships. Power is not a "top-down" phenomenon emanating from those above and dictating to those below: instead, they are manifested throughout society. Since an alternative, power, retains the notion of being utilized and organized by the specific subjects on particular occasions, that it creates other resistances and results, and are not connected to particular subjects or groups. (p. 67)

Foucault further elaborates power network as deliberate, and intentional. He rejects the subject as a centre, that is to say, as a unitary being and self-contained, different from others, because he can think and reason. Yet, ideas about subjects as thinking and acting autonomously are still functioning within modern culture. Discourses of subjectivity, thus stress an archaeological and genealogical analysis. As a result, Foucault (1987) views subjectivity as an outcome and an objective of power, but also as a basis of struggle and negotiation. He considers power as action
about actions. Moreover, these acts of resistance situated in the power hierarchy are present all over the society like resistors in an electric sheet. Hall (1997) elaborates Foucault’s idea of power as a “dynamic control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents. Power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects” (p. 113). While discourse produces power, power is also produced by it, since every discourse produces counter discourse. Citing Foucault’s words, Hall (1997) defines Foucauldian perception of power as:

If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network, which runs throughout the whole social body. (p. 153)

Foucault touches on ‘truth’ as effect of discourse, of the wielding of power for the production of knowledge. There can be no un-mediated access to things-in-themselves – since nothing is meaningful outside of discourse. (Foucault, 1981) Moreover, the idea that truths can be discovered by an appropriately disinterested and rigorous process is undermined by Foucault’s insistence on the historical conditions under which knowledge is produced through discourse. Things are meaningful and ‘true’ only within a specific historical context. (Hall, 1997) As Foucault (1981) comments: “In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject of its role as the originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse” (p. 118). He believes that every society has its regimes of truths that govern and regulate the discourses. This point from Hall (1997) that discourse constitutes its objects, contests the scientific claims to objectivity and truth.
2.2.2 Construction of Subject Positions

The notion of subjectivity encompasses an individual’s conscious and unconscious thoughts, sentiments and perceptions, his/her self-insight and approach to the surrounding world. Nevertheless “language is not an expression of subjectivity, but it is claimed- constitutes subjectivity. The use of language triggers thoughts, ideas and emotions” (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000, p. 164). Given this critical perspective, Hall (1997) studies texts as constructive phenomena that creates and shapes the identities and practices of human beings. Hall works with Foucault’s conception of the individual as produced within discourse and historicizes the subject. He believes that modern regimes of truth function to construct position human beings as subjects who are equally the objects and instruments of power. Though Hall places the body at the centre of the struggles between different formations of knowledge and power, however, he does not give the subject central place in the process of representation. He displaces the subject from the privileged position in the creation of meaning and knowledge. Hall shares Foucault’s view that subjects may create particular texts, but they work within the limits of the episteme, the discursive formation, the regime of the truth, of certain period and context. Hall (1997) states that:

The discourse itself produces the subjects-figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge, which the discourse produces...these figures are specific-to-specific discursive regimes and historical periods. But the discourse also produces a place for the subject from which its particular knowledge and meaning makes most sense...All discourses, then, construct subject-positions from which alone they make sense. (p. 80)

Hall’s approach to representation suggests that contexts are positioned unequally in power relations and have effects. Proceeding with the idea of representation as historically and culturally specific process enmeshed with relations of power, then expounds that knowledge is not gender neutral and that experience is always relative to the context in which it is produced. It is
something which is contextual, grounded and material, as well as being rooted in the “point of view” of particular knowledge producers. Hall’s concern with the constitutive and regulative effects of power arguably makes it a practical and helpful framework for feminist research. Constructionist approach to reality shares feminist opposition of scientific claims to neutrality and reality. It coincides with feminist concerns of the complex power play in the creation of experience, more particularly the idea that all knowledge is socially constructed. Nancy Fraser (1992) suggests the significance of such an approach that can help identify four interconnected points that are:

Firstly, it helps to comprehend how people perceive and change their social identities continuously. Secondly, it points out the way social groups are formed and unformed under unequal conditions. Thirdly, a discourse theory can point out the way the social hegemony of powerful units in society is contested and maintained. Lastly, it illuminates the prospects for emancipatory social and political change. (p. 22)

Therefore, an analysis of a representation derives in part a sense through attempting to understand the world by considering the interdependence of language and an individual. An individual is thought to be culturally and discursively structured, shaped in interaction as a situated, symbolic being. The frequent term for an individual so identified is a ‘subject’. The fundamental view of Hall is that an individual is not independent, autonomous being, instead as a social actor is shaped by those surrounding discourses where he occupies different social positions. Since society constitutes multiple discourses, individuals are multiply situated in a place and time. As Weedon (1987) states:

Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the location where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed... Subjectivity is
produced in a whole range of discursive practices –economic, social, and political –the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power. (p. 2)

This particular attention to power relations, according to Hall (1997) rescues “representation from the clutches of a purely formal theory and gives it a historical, practical and ‘worldly’ context of operation” (p.75). Through Hall’s critique of objective truth or reality, representation, then moves; first, from notions of objectivity towards notions of multiple and contextual ‘truths’ and; second, from the individual as the centre of examination to discourse and the production of objects, subjectivities and practices. Weedon (1987) believes that the countering notion of objective truth or reality does not suggest rejecting experience, materiality, or the body per se. She argues that experience in itself has no innate essential meaning, but acquires a sense in the language from discursive systems of meaning. Fairclough (2003) explains the importance of the context in the process of interpretation in the following words:

Texts inevitably make assumptions. What is ‘said’ in a text is said against a background of what is ‘unsaid’, but taken as given. As with intertextuality, assumptions connect one text to other texts…Both intertextuality and assumption can be seen in terms of claims on the part of the ‘author’-the claim that what is reported was actually said, that what has been assumed has indeed been said or written elsewhere, that one’s interlocutors have indeed heard it or read it elsewhere. (p. 40)

2.3 Approaching the Discursive Context from Feminist Perspective

Though the concept of context is hard to pin down as it is imprecise and uncertain, however, the view of context as dynamic, multiple and evolving is generally agreed upon by the theorists. Contexts embrace social subjects: their physical, social and economic relationships, and physical environment along with the cultural descriptions of their movement and communication.
From a critical perspective, a context of a particular text includes both the social and discursive practices of the text. Therefore, an analysis of the discursive practices of the text considers the creation and response given to the text. The response to the text here means the critical response—consisting of reviews, awards, and scholarly writings. However, as Fairclough (2003) asserts that a text can itself create its context; texts always create meaning in connection with its context of production— the conditions in which it was spoken or written, and the context of use. Accordingly, the context of the situation is more generally the context of culture.

Considering social realities as gendered, Hall (1997) adopts a complex theoretical orientation towards context. Context—is regarded as a diverse, dynamic, mediated and evolving entity rather than static, fixed and unified. In contrast to a relativistic view of context, Hall holds that contexts are positioned unequally in power relations. Proceeding with the notions of discourse as context based, then expounds that knowledge is not gender neutral. All contexts are gendered, classed and raced. As the conditions of existence within a specific context are different for its members—male and female, the power of feminist analysis lies in its minute and detailed examination of economic, social, ideological and political structures, which shape the lived experiences of women. Therefore, feminist critics contest the idea of objective reality. As the truth about the social reality is always produced from a specific social situation, no uniform and consistent social viewpoint actually exist. Human beings are multiply positioned in the social structure, therefore, they have different experiences of the social world which they comprehend differently. Thus, when a social view is offered as final and entirely objective, it only becomes an expression of the unnecessary control that a definite group has in the social order. Individual actors make sense of the surrounded social life by following social practices; feminist researchers concern themselves with the dialectical interplay between social control and human agency (Anderson, 1989). A woman internalizes the social reality and restrictions of the society in which
she is born and lives. A feminist approach to the context primarily concerns itself to understand and explain women’s experiences. Weedon (1987) identifies feminism as:

Feminism is a politics. It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations structure all areas of life: the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and to whom, what we are and what we might become. (p. 1)

Weedon (1987) identifies the roots of contemporary feminism like all other politics, in the Women’s Liberation Movement—a political movement of the late 1960s concerning and affecting every aspect of women’s lives. This movement was organized around the idea of common political, social and financial equality of the sexes. However, the Women’s Liberation Movement and their essentialist definitions of femininity, often implied common female identity and advocated the rights of white, upper class women. They raised their voice for the rights of the middle class white women and addressed issues such as education, employment, the marriage laws. These early feminists were concerned with the problems of working-class women. They mainly addressed the particular inequalities that women of the west countered i.e. rights of higher education, restructuring of female secondary schools, participation and reservation of special quota in civil services, a married woman’s right to own property and an improvement and advancement of the rights of deserted and divorced women regarding the child custody. Later, the Women’s Liberation Movement was severely criticized for advocating the rights of middle class, white women only as Iregaray (2000) raised the objection that, “women's liberation should come about through a dialectic with the ‘other’ gender and its liberation”(p.14). During its inception, women’s struggles which found themselves outside or even conflicting to, the machinery of State and party, unaffected by questions of money and power had gradually spread through contact with women recognized in public organizations and political bodies. This shift and diversity resulted in the multiplicity of feminist politics. However, what is common to all the different
forms of the feminist movement was the centrality of patriarchy as a basis behind the curtailment of women’s rights and powers. Robbins (2000) also believes that the feminist focus on social and psychic structures necessitates patriarchy as the primary category of feminist analysis:

Amongst the social and psychic structures in which feminism is interested are; social deprivations which are not unique to women, but which in a space of dis-privilege may impinge more on women than on men; physical subjugation like domestic responsibilities, child birth and violence; cultural oppression (where women are viewed as objects rather than subjects), physiological oppression (where women internalize a view of themselves inferior). The name given to the intersections of these structures is patriarchy, which means literally the ‘rule of fathers’. (p. 15)

So, feminisms are multiple. (Robbins 2000, p. 3) Feminist theories are pluralist, borrowing from multiple theoretical sources such as Marxism, postmodernism, historicism, postcolonialism, but they always remain women-centred. (Weedon1987, Robbins 2000)

Feminist criticism in its non-literary context fights for women's rights in social, political, cultural, religious, educational, physical and psychological spheres of life. Whereas, feminist literary criticism traces the way literary texts shape specific practices and ideologies. However, all the different approaches of the feminism advocate equal rights for women within the society, politics, employment, education, and personal life. They reject and oppose established and conventional roles of women; they disagree in a number of ways. As Brown and Olson (1978) declare that while all of them agree that women are exploited and oppressed by their cultural and social surroundings, they are not unanimous regarding the features and traits which differentiate men from women: which of these differences are worth maintaining, how society can be changed and ways to achieve their objectives. Feminism is a dynamic theory and does not accept any single definition. In the words of Tuttle (1986) “feminism is a call to action. It can never be
simply a belief system. Without action, feminism is merely empty rhetoric which cancels itself out” (p. 107). This suggests that there is not a single ‘feminist’ perspective or stance, nor feminism is a monolithic category. Contemporary critical theory speaks of feminisms. As Robbins (2000) in her introduction to literary feminisms makes the point:

The word feminism is anti-totalizing. It is not confused with absolute truth. It does not have one catchall, all-or-nothing meaning, but many meanings, which depend on contexts, subject positions, languages, the material worlds we inhabit, and our own psychic spaces, all mixed up together. And one of feminism’s meanings has precisely to do with overstepping boundaries, defying limits and refusing to be contained in or by ready made systems of signification. It is about making meanings as well as referring to the old ones. (p. 3)

Feminist theory doesn’t represent a coherent or unified field that could be characterized by a particular approach. (Robbins 2000, Weedon 1987) Rosemarie Putnam Tong (1993) also elucidates, “feminism is not a monolithic ideology … all feminists do not think alike, and like all other time-honoured modes of thinking, feminist thought has a past as well as a present and a future” (p. 1). Therefore, different theoretical perspectives give rise to diverse definitions of feminism. As Robbins (2000) observes:

Sex and gender are not, however, the only sites of women’s oppression – one can be oppressed because one is poor, black, under-educated, lesbian, enslaved, imprisoned. But where entire groups are oppressed, women often get it worst. Feminisms are therefore politicized discourses, which uncover the symptoms of oppression, whatever their grounds are, diagnose the problem, and offer alternative versions of livable realities. (p. 34)
Feminist theorists also vary both in their approaches towards the concept of gender determined facts and in their suggestions for the re-enactment of systematic and unorganized discourses. What is shared by all feminist theories, whether literary theories or not, is a focus on women. A feminist stance primarily applies women’s or gender perspective to a variety of social phenomena. It counters the oppressive ideologies and practices which women encounter while living in a society and indeed worldwide and with the origins of these ideologies and practices, and how they are maintained. Patricia Maguire (1987) counts the vital features that shape feminism:

Feminism is: (a) a belief that women universally face some form of oppression or exploitation; (b) a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms and (c) a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression. (p. 79)

Within both feminist criticism and feminist literary criticism, gender serves as the fundamental category of analysis, where gender is regarded as a socially constructed and historically changing reality. Literary feminism challenges the conventional description of women as insufficient and assumes that women endure discrimination because of their sex. Judith Kegan Gardiner (1980) believes that since both male and female live differently because of the gender differences; consequently these inconsistencies are revealed in their writing. As feminist theorist Robbins (2000) comments:

Feminist theories are pluralist. They borrow from wherever they get what is useful. A feminist literary theorist might well be a Marxist materialist with psychoanalytic leanings and fingers in several post-structuralist, post-colonialist, and post-modernist pies, all of which help her to read texts closely, but also to understand them against the grain. For if women have been oppressed by more than one structure, and then they may require more
than one set of explanations to describe their current conditions, and to prescribe for future improvements. (p.14)

Feminist literary criticism concerns itself with the authenticity and expression of a female writer and her female characters in literature. Greene and Kahn (1985) define feminist literary criticism as a branch of multidisciplinary inquiry that views gender as a basic element of social experience. This analysis presumes two related concepts of gender as socially created, and thereby a fundamental aspect of analysis for any social discipline. Secondly, that a male perception believed to be ‘universal’, has dominated fields of knowledge, shaping their paradigms and methods. This entails that gender is context bound and differs from one culture to the other. It also suggests that women's experiences are profoundly different from the experiences of men. As Cixous (2000) complains:

In philosophy woman is always on the side of passivity. Every time the question comes up; when we examine kinship structures; whenever the family model is brought into play; in fact, as soon as you ask yourself what is meant by the question ‘What is it’; as soon as there is a will to say something. A will, desire, authority, you examine that, and you are led right back- to the father...And if you examine literary history, it’s the same story. It all refers back to the man, to his torment, his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father.

There is an intrinsic bond between the philosophical and the literary and phallocentrism. (p. 265)

Thereby, feminist literary criticism while analysing female characters reveals the way women and the roles they play are determined and influenced by the society. It examines the representation and position of women characters by different writers. While not overlooking the importance of theory in the study of the literary texts, it is argued that decontextualising the literary texts from
the social contexts that created them and to which they refer restrains their profound understanding.

2.4 Divorce Discourse and Contemporary Literary Theory

In her study of the politics and development of feminist thought in novel studies, Nancy Armstrong in her essay entitled, “What Feminism Did to Novel Studies” (2006) asserts that critical investigations of feminism in novel studies emerged as a reaction to Ian Watt’s dismissal of Eighteenth century women novelists from canonical literary criticism. Watt’s identification of “the origins of the novel studies” held profound influence in the literary circles until 1980s when feminism entered the debate over the novel’s origin. Armstrong (2006) writes:

In his monumental study The Rise of the Novel (1957), Ian Watt concedes that the ‘majority of eighteenth-century novels were written by women’, though he limits his book’s scope to Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, because he claims women’s control over the novel was ‘a purely quantitative dominance.

Published in 1957, Ian Watt’s The Rise of Novel is regarded as one of the founding texts of the literary theory and criticism. Armstrong challenges the two dominant assumptions that Watt shares. Firstly, he proposes that novel had its origin in the male writings, which as a consequent pushed both women novelists and women’s issues to the margins. According to Armstrong (2006) this assumption remained unchallenged until the late 1980s, when feminism entered the debate over the partial representation of women novelists within dominant literary traditions. She objected against Ian Watt’s deliberate exclusion of the fiction authored by women by pointing out that during the eighteenth century women novelists wrote more than half of the novel. With the publication of two foundational texts dealing with feminist issues which include “A Literature of Their Own (1977)” by Elaine Showalter and “The Madwoman in the Attic (1979)” written by
Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, everything changed. Secondly, Watt identifies realism as the dominant novel tradition and accords central position to the theme of marriage to the structure of the novel, especially on account of its realistic mode of narration. Identifying the birth of the novel in the sociological and philosophical setting of the eighteenth century England, Watt (1957) states that realism fundamental to the form of the novel rises “from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses”(p. 12). Thus the novel employing a realist mode of narration uses the authenticity of the individual to form its narrative structures. This individualistic dimension differs from earlier literary forms, such as classical drama, that do not reveal space and time as the individual experiences them. In addition, this individualist dimension causes the novelist to deal with the character’s personal experience rather than universals. Watt (1957) also details the ways the in which a novel displays the specific tendencies of the age, together with the promise of economic independence in capitalism, the concept of the cannibal family, and the mounting significance of and choice in selecting a partner. While Watt maintains that Defoe wrote the first realist novels in English, he praises Richardson for resolving one of the “major formal problems Defoe left unresolved”(p. 135). Richardson’s resolution, writes Watt (1957) is “remarkably simple: he avoided an episodic plot by basing his novels on a single action, a courtship”(p. 135). The importance of Richardson’s solution is evident in the successive narration of the novel; the convention of the novel comes to be defined by its comedic ending: “Yes, dear reader. I married him.” As such, marriage becomes not only an indispensable part of the novel’s substance, but also essential to its structure. Accordingly, it would seem divorce, as the break up of marriage, would be the focus for critics studying the history of marriage and the novel. Conversely, divorce as a theme of fiction has remained unexplored.
2.5 Postcolonial Feminist Literary Theory and the Crisis of Representation

Ian Watt’s 1957 dismissal of eighteenth century women authors’ literary production as quantitatively superior yet qualitatively inferior to male writers represented the century long accretion of gender partialities in the formation of literary theory, especially with respect to constructing the history of the “rise of novel” as the ascendance of male bourgeois subjects. Watt’s consideration typifies the nature of biased representation of literary history, which was scrutinized by feminist criticism in the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that human experience is gendered is central to the radical implication of the feminist theory. The acknowledgment of the impact of gender and an insistence on the importance of female experience has provided vital common ground for feminist theory and criticism. The recovery and interpretation of women’s experiences have been central concerns of the feminist movement from the early pioneering work to the present. As a result of the practical application of French and Anglo American feminist theory to literary analysis, the 1980s were a crucial decade for the reappraisal of women authors in literary theory.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s influential study of the literary representations of women The Mad Woman in the Attic (1979), resulted in a number of inquiries into literature not only about but also by women in the diversity of periods. “Images of the woman Criticism” from the 1970s was in the subsequent decade, extended an inquiry into literature created by women, noticeably the eighteenth century women authors. In the British tradition, Jane Spencer’s The Rise of the Woman Novelist: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen (1986) and Dale Spender’s Mothers of the Novel (1986) constitute important steps in recovering women’s literary contributions. Nancy Armstrong’s Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (1987) presents a Foucauldian approach to the issue by examining the role of middle class women
at the centre of the class struggle, first between the bourgeois and the aristocracy and later between bourgeois and the labouring classes. In the 1990s, Cheryl Turner’s *Living by the Pen* (1992) explored the professionalism of women’s authorship and Margaret A. Doody’s *The True Story of the Novel* (1996) discussed women’s self contained development. Clifford Siskin’s *The Work of Writing* (1998) discusses the “great forgetting that became the Great Tradition”, as the neglect of every woman author in the period 1700-1830 in Britain except Jane Austin. More recently, Michael McKeon’s monumental study *The Secret History of the Domesticity: public, private and the division of knowledge* (2005) provides reader with an exploration of women’s role as producers of literature, a topic largely omitted from his earlier *The Origins of the English Novel* (1987). These are some of the works of the past thirty years that have critiqued Ian Watt’s dismissive claim and have led to further discussions and debates. In the late 1990s, these questions led to an opening of the body of the writings and debates led to the questions whose theoretical underpinnings challenged the Eurocentric style of feminist criticism.

The issue of representation is central to the theoretical debates of postcolonial and feminist theorization. Gandhi (1998) says, “Feminist and postcolonial theory alike began with an attempt to simply invert prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race, and they... refuse the binary oppositions upon which patriarchal/colonial authority constructs itself” (p. 83). Feminist criticism and post-colonial theory share many similarities in their approach, and have been regarded as complimentary for a long time. Gandhi (1998) points out three main controversial features that rupture the unity between these two disciplines as “the debate surrounding the figure of the ‘third-world woman’; the problematic history of the ‘feminist-as-imperialist’; and finally, the colonialist deployment of ‘feminist criteria’ to bolster the appeal of the ‘civilizing mission’”(p. 83). In postcolonial theory, “one conceptual thread that links all its various interpretations is the rejection of Universalism, which refers to the “notion of a unitary and homogeneous human nature” (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 55). The “unitary human nature” of which postcolonial theorists
speak is the European colonizer as the quintessential human being. The universal standard by which all other identities are measured (the European identity) embodies the ideal human being for the colonized to emulate and becomes the main vehicle through which European colonization is completely achieved. (Ashcroft, et al., 1995) Defining post-colonialism, Bertens (2001) puts in his book *Literary Theory: The Basics*: “In the 1980s commonwealth literary studies became part of then emerging and now a vast field of literary, cultural, political, and historical inquiry that we call postcolonial studies… postcolonial theory and criticism studies emphasizes the tension between the metropolis and the (former) colonies”(p. 199-200). It examines the effects of cultural dislocation –and its effects on individual and social identities –that certainly are the outcome of colonial invasion and control and it does so from a colonial standpoint. Postcolonial theory and criticism radically questions aggressive imperialism and expansion of the colonizing powers. In particular, it condemns the system of values that supported imperialism and that is still dominant within the Western world. Bhabha (1992) has put it this way:

Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of ‘minorities’ within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south…They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the ‘rationalizations’ of modernity. (p. 438)

Post-colonialism, according to Bhabha (1992) similar to the concept of oppression, in general is a substantial involvement into explanations of modernity- “progress, homogeneity, cultural organism, the deep nation, the long past –that rationalize the authoritarian, the ‘normalizing’ tendencies within cultures in the name of national interest” (p.4). Sara Mills (1999) explains these two terms as:
Although within the post-colonial theory, there is great debate about the meaning of these two terms, we will take colonial to mean those texts, which were written during the period of high British imperialism, roughly from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Colonial discourse is used as a term, which both describe all of these texts, literary and non-literary, and it is also used to describe the critical approach to these texts. (p. 26)

Post-colonial criticism studies texts written during and after the colonial period. However, the range of postcolonial studies is still debated. Bertens (2001) in his book *Literary Theory: The Basics* points that the critics are not unanimous on what postcolonial studies may claim as its historical and geographical scope. These continuing debates have raised the questions of inclusion and exclusion of different cultures, about its historical range, and the start of post-colonialism. However, despite all the diversity of postcolonial definitions, theorists and critics are engaged in the “reassessment of the traditional relationship between the metropolis and its colonial subjects and in the radical deconstruction – either along post-structuralist or along more traditional lines– of the imperialist perspective” (Bertens 2001, p. 202).

The issues and debates central to postcolonial critics are ‘their focus on colonial and (and neo-colonial) oppression, on resistance to colonization, on the respective identities of colonizer and colonized, on the ensuing hybridity of both the cultures, and so on and so forth” (Bertens 2001, p. 202). Fundamental to these concerns are issues of language, class, race, gender, identity and more importantly power. Revolutionizing the domain of literary and cultural analysis, postcolonial theory has never been a unified intellectual movement. It is broadly divided between two schools of thought. This split in the conceptual framework of the postcolonial approach is the outcome of the mixed heritage of the discipline itself. Post-colonialism is the offspring of a historically embedded, economically informed Marxist criticism, which builds on traditions of collective resistance developed in anti-colonial national liberation movements (armed struggles
against colonial rule which took place across the world, in numerous countries, in the mid-
twentieth century). Moreover it is also indebted to the work of the radical French intellectuals and
philosophers of the 1960s and is thus the heir to a less clearly historicized cultural theorizing that
employs the linguistic guerrilla tactics of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis – disciplines
which both ask searching questions about the connection between language, power and identity.
Post-structuralism in particular has concerned itself with the instability of meaning and through
its focus on ambiguity in language, challenges concepts such as objectivity, difference and truth.
Although both post colonialism’s ‘parents’ agree that their offspring is concerned with resistance
to and critique of ‘empire’ (in both its old colonial form and its new neo-colonial economic
guise), they have differed widely over the forms this resistance takes.

The field of postcolonial studies in its contemporary theoretically oriented form began
with the publication of one of the founding texts of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978). Influenced
by the ideas and thoughts Foucault and Gramsci, Said’s work revolutionized the study of Oriental
cultures and their literatures, thus proceeding towards what is today recognized as postcolonial
theory. According to Bertens (2001) Orientalism “is a devastating critique of how through the ages, but particularly in the 19th century- the heyday of imperialist expansion – Western texts have represented the East, and more specifically the Islamic Middle East”(p. 203). Although Orientalism (1978) sometimes drew in a conflicting way from the thoughts of Antonio Gramsci and the French philosopher Michel Foucault, Said contends in Orientalism (1987) that the extensive study and representation of the Orient across several centuries of Western history was actually a highly political construction of Arabic culture as the ‘Other’– the negative reflection-of a more rational, civilized and developed European ‘Self’. For Said (1987), the representation/construction of the Orient, thus acted as an ideological complement to colonialism. As regards Said’s contribution to the field of postcolonial studies, Bertens (2001) affirms that although race, ethnicity and the dominant position of the metropolis was already well established
on the literary critical agenda. However, Said was the first to draw on the new French theory and Gramsci in dealing with these issues as, “Orientalism offered a challenging theoretical framework and a new perspective on the interpretation of Western writing about the East and of the writing produced under the colonial rule” (p. 205).

Consequently, postcolonial feminist theorists contest the power and gendered dynamics of the politics of representation framed by their subaltern location in the postcolonial context. Thinking as a postcolonial feminist involves challenging much of what has been considered as ‘representing’. As a critical approach, postcolonial feminist studies not only commented on the Western feminism’s exclusive representation of the Western women’s writings but also the denigrating universalizing treatment of the Third World women in literature. Gayatri Chakravoty Spivak (1994), one of the pioneer postcolonial critics, identifies that the Western feminist claims of homogeneity pushes the representational right of the third world women to the margins. Gayatri Spivak obscures the concept of the Other, which she explains as the disadvantaged and dispossessed postcolonial female who is found beyond the margins of representation. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994) she points out that a theory of the subject that effectively obliterates questions of mediation through sign-systems leads to the conclusion that the oppressed can speak for themselves. This suggests that the subject so represented is apparent and directly open to disclosure. Spivak argues this inhabits an “interested” denial by Western intellectuals to acknowledge their institutional privilege to accept that “everything they read, critical or uncritical is trapped within the discussion of the construction of that Other, sustaining or criticizing the establishment of the Subject as Europe” (1994). Postcolonial theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” debates the ‘composite, singular, ‘Third World woman’ as a creation of much of Western feminism’s partial acceptance of humanist positions that engage “the necessary recuperation of the ‘East’ and ‘Woman’ as Others” (1991). Mohanty (1991) argues that the relationship between ‘Woman’—a cultural and
ideological composite *Other* constructed through diverse representational discourses (scientific, literary, judicial, linguistic, cinematic, etc.)—and ‘women’—real, material subjects of their collective histories—is one of the central questions which feminist scholarship seeks to address. She does not perceive this connection as one of “direct identity, or a relation of correspondence or a relation of simple implication” (Mohanty 1991). Working against broad generalizations that are a legacy of *Orientalizing* habits of thought, anthropological discourses and a paternalistic rhetoric of humanism, Mohanty (1991) emphasizes on a strategy of reading the *Other* within its own cultural, social, historical, economic, and political contexts. These debates articulate the thoughts of postcolonial feminists who have been marginalized from the canon, literary studies.

The concept of representation occupies a central place in postcolonial feminist theory as it constructs the relationship between meaning and the context. Sara Mills (1994) in her essay “Postcolonial Feminist Theory” suggests that the postcolonial feminist project can be described as one of interrupting the discourses of postcolonial theory and liberal Western feminism, while simultaneously refusing the singular ‘Third-World-Woman’ as the object of study. She maintains that the power relations under which representations are constructed and deployed are recurrently a focus of attention in feminist analysis. She critically argues that the centrality of representation within postcolonial feminist debates negates the essentialist idea of woman as the subject of feminism, but rather implies woman within the social context as a category of feminist analysis. In the following sections, the study reviews and responds to mainstream postcolonial feminist literary theory not from the centre, but from the periphery: the subaltern.

### 2.6 Subalternity and Postcolonialism

Antonio Gramsci, who utilized the term in his Prison Notebooks to describe ‘groups or classes’, which were socially inferior and had no ideological power, first introduced the term
‘subaltern’ in the late 1930s. He used the term instead of ‘proletarian’ in order to escape censorship, but it soon came to designate less organized working-class groups such as peasants and farm labourers. The subaltern classes are those individuals or groups that are subjugated by hegemony and are excluded from having any meaningful position from which to speak. In the context of the present study, Gramsci’s notion of subalternity seems particularly important. Rather than comprising a unified set of ideas, it has implications for rethinking the nature and meaning of subalternity away from essential notions of oppressor and oppressed toward a more complex understanding of the ways in which the subalternity of divorced female protagonist is implicated in postcolonial patriarchal formations through mechanisms of both coercion and consent. Green (2011) regards Gramsci as a crucial barometer in the quest to understand the configurations of subalternity. What follows is an attempt to review some of Green’s investigations of Gramsci’s idea of subalternity, which invites a different set of speculations about the nature of the subaltern, one that does not make totalizing assumptions about subalternity but rather claims it to be complex problematic that directly concerns the overall existence of a subject. In his first notebook (1929–30), Gramsci uses the term “subaltern in the literal sense, referring to noncommissioned military troops who are subordinate to the authority of lieutenants, colonels, and generals” (Cited in Greens 2011, p. 54). In his later writings, he utilizes the term metaphorically to suggest positions of subordination or oppression. Gramsci approached the subalternity as “historically determined,” status founded on concrete historical practices rather than abstract or speculative notions of identity. Green (2011) quotes Gramsci’s words: “Subaltern classes are subject to the initiatives of the dominant class, even when they rebel; they are in a state of anxious defence” (p. 55). What Green (2011) argues in his study that subaltern groups are subordinate to a ruling group’s policy and initiatives” (p. 68-69). Green (2011) summarizes the Gramsci’s approach to subalternity in the following words:
Gramsci’s interest in the subaltern was threefold. He was interested in producing a methodology of subaltern historiography, a history of the subaltern classes, and a political strategy of transformation based upon the historical development and existence of the subaltern. This threefold approach creates a nexus where a variety of Gramsci’s concepts converge. History, politics, literary criticism, and cultural practices are all under consideration in his analysis of subaltern history. In his notes, Gramsci is interested in how the subaltern came into being, what sociopolitical relations caused their formation, what political power they hold, how they are represented in history and literature, and how they can transform their consciousness and, in turn, their lived conditions. (p. 69)

Following this summation of Gramsci’s theoretical approach to subalterntiy, Green emphasizes that a subaltern analysis is based upon the investigation and observation of particular, concrete, and practical events and pieces of information and how they relate to broader relations, developments, and structures that exist within particular historical, economic, political, social, and cultural contexts. Thereby, several conclusions can be drawn regarding Green’s interpretation of Gramsci’s ideas about subaltern groups and their activity. First, Gramsci believed that it was possible to produce a history of subaltern classes, even if it was an arduous task. Second, he argued that subaltern groups develop in various degrees or phases that correspond to levels of political organization, which the historian has to take into consideration. Third, subaltern groups are faced with an ensemble of political, social, cultural, and economic relations that produce marginalisation and prevent group autonomy. Fourth, although subaltern groups face many difficulties, they have the ability to transform their subordinate social positions. In fact, the transformation of the subaltern’s subordinate social position was Gramsci’s ultimate goal and, through his analyses, he formulated a political strategy for such a transformation.
As discussed in Gayatri Spivak’s renowned essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994), postcolonialism and feminism share the similarity in their attempt to speak about the exclusions of their experiences from Eurocentric forms of knowledge production. In mapping the complexity of imperial hierarchies and power relations between the centre and margin, Spivak argues that most of the knowledge created during the colonial period centred round colonial masculinity. Therefore, postcolonialism at its most fundamental level, was lacking in perspectives and experiences other than the postcolonial male subjects. It is therefore that Spivak has used the term “subaltern” to describe the groups of people who have been excluded from postcolonial forms of knowledge creation. With continuing references to postcolonial theory as the continuation of Eurocentric patriarchal legacy, Spivak has confronted the exclusion of native women from postcolonial academic writing and theorizing. Spivak challenges the general failure of postcolonial structures to involve those forms of resistance that colonial women faced to end imperial rule.

Related to the cultural and economic maintenance of power, Spivak claims the position of ‘gendered subaltern’ for the colonized women. Spivak’s (1994) idea of gendered subalterns with regard to their agency holds that as women are systematically subordinated, their ability to speak and to choose and act freely is also gravely compromised. Spivak’s work offers a major insight regarding gendered subaltern’s identity and agency and casts them as problematic aspects of their lives. Since, within patriarchal social orders women are treated as subordinates, they rigorously control women’s speech and choice. Spivak analyses the subaltern agency as an instance of internalized oppression. As a category of study, Spivak has referred to the influence of imbalanced relationships of power on the experiences of colonized women. Nevertheless, Spivak (1994) also realizes that the “colonized subaltern subject,” including the subaltern female subject, is “irretrievably heterogeneous.” Although it is indeed important to challenge the hegemony of white Western (bourgeois) feminism by letting Third-World women speak for themselves, it is
equally important to recognize the diversity in these subject positions, in which gender is but one constitutive factor. Even within a particular class and ethnic group, there are variety of subject-positions and voices to be heard and represented.

2.7 Space of Representation

Being positioned on the margin of the dominant discourse seems to express itself in a preoccupation with boundaries and space. The notion of a border giving physical presence in a state of marginality is recurrent in both women’s and postcolonial writing. So too are notions of invisible boundaries and spatial segregation based on gender, ethnicity, social class and other categories of identity. However, contestation and renegotiation of the meaning of spaces are always possible, so that the remaking of spaces is central to much feminist and postcolonial work. (Upstone 2009, p. 29)

In all the selected five novels, women novelists have mainly used the metaphor of space, more specifically the trope of the house, as a location of contact and conflict in order to suggest its centrality in the formation and continuation of the subalternity of female divorcee. To frame the discussion of these fictional spaces, and in particular how they constitute and frame the subaltern identites of these characters, the study will look at the issue and the politics of spatiality from a feminist perspective, especially from a postcolonial perspective. This section explores the concept of space, feminist debates of the gendered space before going on to investigate some of the ways in which postcolonial novelists seek to re-imagine women’s spatial boundaries and the centrality of space in the creation of subalternity of divorced women through the image of the house.
Space is an elusive term-as it is both a part of material reality and also the diverse ways in which people experience and interprets this reality. Indeed, the idea of the spatial representation within this study essentially draws upon Soja’s (1996) phenomenological understanding of space. Soja’s argument of “the spatialization of history, the making of history entwined with the social production of space, the structuring of a historical geography” helps facilitate an analysis of spaces which postcolonial women inhabit; in particular external lived spaces are always governed by a set of power relations, hence “space is fundamental in any exercise of power”(p. 43). Soja (1996) critically re-considers the social and historical dialectics of space – and constructs space only as a structure of an experience that incorporates both ‘historicality’ and ‘sociality’. Soja believes that space is never given. Unlike an ‘empty box’ to be occupied, or a stage or background, it is always a culturally mediated reality of the general cultural system, and is shaped and altered, approved or disproved like any other cultural entity. Space for Soja (1996) is inclusive of ‘place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory and geography” (p. 50). This approach facilitates the idea of a “space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange” and is “predicated upon the existence of plurality. Multiplicity and space as co-constitutive”(Soja, 1996, p. 9). His approach incorporates the polarities among gender, class, race approaches to the spatiality of an experience. Such a consideration of space assumes a subject – a man or woman (or, in narrative fiction, a male or female character) who experiences space through his or her existential living conditions. Furthermore, this epistemological understanding of space embodies not only a place but also time.

Bachelard (1964) emphasizes the relation between place and time. As Bachelard (1964) puts it,“our understanding of space influences both identity and identity formation, and this effect of space is “closely related to when and how we inhabit a given place”(p. 76). For Bachelard (1964), this aspect of the place is affiliated with the question of when, and how, a social subject (or a fictional character or narrator) is positioned in a given place, and how this place is related to
the larger space of which it forms a constituent element. Carter (1993) reminds us that space and place remain fundamental to our experience:

If places are no longer the clear supports of our identity, they nonetheless play a potentially important part in the symbolic and physical dimension of our identifications. It is not spaces which ground identifications, but places. How then does space become place? By being named as the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population. The place is a space to which meaning has been ascribed. (p. xii)

Narrative space can be identified as the fictional world presented by the narrative discourse. As Sabine Buchholz and Manfred Jahn (2005) observe this narrative space – in which the action of the story unfolds and where the fictional characters move about – is represented by a complex of parameters: “(1) by the margins that part it from coordinate, super-ordinate, and subordinate spaces; (2) by the objects which it surrounds; (3) by the living conditions which it offers; and (4) by the temporal dimension to which it is bound” (p. 552). The constituent elements of all four parameters contribute to the construction of the narrative space. Thus narrative space is always material, it can also be psychological and emotional and for a variety of reasons is significantly vital and influential for the fictional characters who inhabit it. Given the centrality of space for the experience, Western feminists have always debated on the spatial politics of difference and have considered spaces and their respective subdivisions as fundamental both to patriarchal power and to feminist resistance, since “spatial metaphors have become a key way of thinking and writing about struggle and transformation” (McDowell, 1983). Linda McDowell (1983) in her essay “Place and Space” points out the significance of place and its relationship to gendered identities:
Whereas men were the idealized rational, civilized Enlightenment subject, full participants as workers and citizens in the public arena of the economy and politics, women were dependants, to be protected and kept close. They were to provide sustenance and nurture to their men folk and children through the construction of a place of leisured and domestic calm. If men’s role was in the public sphere, then women’s was to be in the private arena: an ideal complementary between the sexes was established in which, according to the political theorist John Stuart Mill, neither was inferior, merely different.

In this sense, spaces as symbols of gender difference and their association with identity ascertains that as men and women normally play different social roles, they inhabit different spaces and that these inhabited spaces serve to emphasize the gendered nature of space. Elizabeth Jackson (2011) puts it:

Certainly, many of the struggles of western feminism can be seen as a diverse array of challenges to the distinction between the public and the private and to the comparative value accorded to them. There have been attempts to build domestic spaces that do not rely on the privatized domestic labour of women; there have been many struggles to reconstitute the public so that women have a right to occupy its spaces and participate in its activities; there have been attempts to give a higher status to the domestic sphere, as well as struggles to erase the distinction entirely. (p. 58)

In the move from a politics, centred round claims of equality and a tentative refutation of modernist ideas, contemporary thought engrossed with ideas of context, space and location has dominated feminist theory. In *A room of One’s Own* (1982) Woolf has also taken up the issue of space and has focused on the powerful boundaries which are often set within female socialization as a result of the limited spaces which a female is allowed to occupy. Many prominent feminist
thinkers, most specifically Donna Haraway (1991) and Sandra Harding (1991) take up the Woolf’s idea of a house as a site of resistance subsequently. They argue that the division between public and private space is more consequential in some women’s lives than in others, and similarly the spatial ideology is determined by race, culture, gender, religion, and generational variants. They point towards the complex and diverse social and geographical locations of women and gender that cannot be analysed in isolation from discussions about race, imperialism, sexuality, and power. Consequently, Linda McDowell (1983) argues that “a locational approach to understanding gendered identities demands an analysis of the ways in which the intersections of social processes of stratification and distinction and movements for social justice result in different and changing gender identities and relations” (p. 27).

Spaces like identities are more complex, contextual, and contested than the simplistic binaries critiqued in western feminism. Critic challenging the ethnocentric forms of feminism who claim to speak for the rights of all women have extended Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (1991) critique of the Eurocentric view of Western feminisms argue that it is tied to the west, white, middle-class perspective. The critique of the public/private space divide, while critical for the evolution of the women’s movement in the United States, is viewed in light of the privileged social and racial position of the theorists. The idea of ‘gendered space’ is a development of, amongst other, Jeremy Hawthorn’s mapping of feminist criticism. Jeremy Hawthorn (1996) argues that the geographical, social, cultural, and historical markers that define, a space out of a neutral territory are always inflected by gender (literary landscapes), but others note its application to a wider range of cultural markers. Hawthorn (1996) further comments:

If Virginia Woolf reminded her readers that a room of one’s own meant different things depending upon whether the ‘one’ in question was male or female, for Jean Rhys a room occupied by a penniless woman constitutes a different space from a room occupied by
one lucky enough to be in possession of the £500 a year that Woolf famously inherited. Woolf’s room of her own can easily become a tomb of one’s own for the penniless, deracinated, single woman. (p. 28)

Therefore, an assertion of spatial segregation in terms of gender is not universal, but in many societies in which it occurs, it is related to a peripheral position for women- the negative association is greatest when segregation limits women’s right to knowledge in the public realm. That spatial segregation usually equals lower status for women is borne out in many examples, and postcolonial feminist critics persist that women’s status is low in postcolonial contexts with decidedly discriminated public and private spaces. Informed – among other things – by negotiations of gender, of class, of religion, and of sexuality, the divergent politics of individual locations. Postcolonial feminists draw attention to the multiple registers of experience that inform how gendered identities develop differently. Therefore, limited physical spaces have been regarded as an instrument for perpetuating patriarchy itself- with public spaces seen as an out rightly male territory and the private spaces as a sphere of female restriction:

The centre needs its margin; hence the paradox that the ‘others’ in terms of gender and cultural identity are marginalized, but also given their own places: the slum, the ghetto, the zenana, the harem, the colony, the closet, the Third World, the private. Moreover, space and behaviour are intimately and intricately related. Aside from physical and geographical borders, other, invisible boundaries affect human behaviour and keep individuals in place, such as the boundaries enclosing ghettos and ethnically segregated areas but also the glass ceilings placed above professional women. There are also the insidiously powerful boundaries, which often lie within the female psyche because of women’s socialization. Indeed, femininity itself has been defined as ‘a tradition of imposed limitations. (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 14)
Establishing women’s identities to be constituted by space as they are by sex and gender, an essential role is played by houses and domesticity in reinforcing colonial and patriarchal values. As Bachelard (1969) says: “the term conveys simple pleasures, familial togetherness, privacy and freedom, a sense of belonging, of security, a place to escape from but also to return to, a secure memory, an ideal. These multiple connotations extend to a wider spatial scale than simply the dwelling itself”(p. 20). The house is about identity. Bachelard (1969) describes a house in terms of our first cosmos, the place of memories, of identity itself. Certainly, the whole space is infused with ideas about the house. Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space* (1969) identifies multiple spatial dimensions of human existence, including internal, external and intimate spaces. In relation to the outside world, the house forms the point of orientation or ‘place’. But the notion of house – its meanings and relationships – is never permanent and fixed. Instead, it is fluid and manifold, shifting over time as people depart, perhaps never to come back, as their views modify and vary over other life experiences. Bachelard (1969) adds another aspect of space that he identifies as ‘intimate space’-related to the realm of memory or imagination. It is a container for many behaviours and actions, a set of memories and a key representative of a culture, directing to the fundamental ways of living in a particular society and gender relations.

For Anne McClintock (1995) the postcolonial house is a site of social relations that are structured by power and inequality, colonization colluded with and reinforced an indigenous patriarchy to worsen women’s predicament, mainly in disempowering women from a political process. She states that imperialism was “a violent encounter with pre-existing hierarchies of power that took shape not as an unfolding of its own inner destiny, but as an untidy, opportunistic interference with other regimes of power” (McClintock 1995, p. 6). It is clear that the domestic sphere, that private zone most associated with female labour and most characterized as a feminine zone was also a vital support for maintaining colonial domination. For Anne McClintock (1995) domestic middle-class values were precisely those required for aggressive imperial expansion, so
that the home becomes a microcosm of the colony as “the cult of domesticity became a crucial arena for rationalizing emergent middle-class identity and its presiding values” (p. 169). One result of this division and idealization is the production of an explicitly gendered space placing women at the heart of the imperial project. The idealized domesticity of Victorian society not only constructed gender roles; it did so partly to serve colonial needs. Anne McClintock (1995) has argued that the production of domesticity within the Victorian period was not something which simply occurred at the same time as high imperialism, but rather it served an integral part in its production. Another area of significant disempowerment that women faced during colonialism, according to McClintock (1995) is located in a rigid separation between private and public realms fostered, especially by the Victorian ideology of women as ‘good wives and mothers’. She argues that the obsessive cleanliness of the Victorians, which centred on the management of women's labour within the household produced a particular type of domesticity that was very labour-intensive.

Although, a house (as a manifestation of space) can contribute to the formation of human identity, it does not follow that place or places cannot complicate and disturb our sense of identity as well. This is reflected in the work of Sara Mills (1998), for whom the colonial home has an ideological function, the colonial bungalow evidence of how “private life was lived as if always in public” (p. 114). House, as a material reality is suggestive of social status and occupation of its residents in the sense of both their exterior structure and interior arrangement and its role as a site for multiple activities as well as gender and family relationships. It is a container of conflicting activities; a location of memories that are structured by power relationships that serves as a mediator link between material and cultural practices. Mills’ awareness of the house as socially lived space with the unstable nature of power relations is informed by Foucault’s idea of panopticism, which he developed in *Discipline: The Birth of the Prison* (1982). Foucault had taken the idea of panoptican described by 18th century theorist, Jeremy Benthem. He explained it
as an architectural prison structure that organized the prisoners in such a way that it was possible for the jailor to monitor the inmates any time without being seen, and without any of the convicts having contact with each other. Foucault (1982) has described this spatial arrangement as symbolic of self-surveillance:

A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this was a tower pierced by large windows opening onto the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells, each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening onto the inside facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the ring of cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer’s gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection. (p. 147)

Underlying this arrangement of spatial structure is the assumption of internalized disciplinary practice in order to ensure the imposition of control and restrictions on behaviour: visibility forces one to act as if one is constantly being monitored. Foucault (1982) argues that Panopticon is used “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So, to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (p. 201). Thus, the management of power relations through the Panopticon compels the prisoners to internalize surveillance, as he claims that “is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution, of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power” (p. 205). Seeing that Wigley (1992) states “marriage is the reason for building a house. The house appears to make a
space for the institution. But marriage has been already spatial. It cannot be thought outside the house that is its condition of possibility before its space” (p. 336). The house, in other words makes marriage a possibility by providing the space that man and woman can occupy together so reproduction can occur. Wigley (1992) interprets space as an early concept of the bedroom. Being a significant basis of the institutions of marriage and family, the bedroom represents a space that is particularly invested in creating the marginality of the women. Traditionally, the bedroom is the room where people retreat when they are sick, where they go to sleep, where they seek safety for their bodies and minds. In other words, the “bedroom is a space people inhabit when they are particularly vulnerable” (Wigley 1992, p. 26). Moreover, it means that the home may also question the prejudices of patriarchy and class differentiation that are equally prevalent in the home:

Madhu Kishwar in her a famous article entitled “A Horror of ‘Isms’, Why I Do Not Call Myself a Feminist”(2004) examines the ideological presentation of the middle class post-colonial women and the role tradition plays in limiting their place to home as, “in our culture, both men and women are taught to value the interests of their families and not to make their lives revolve around individual self-interest”(p. 30). However, she has complained of Indian women’s lack of belonging and individual rights within families:“An Indian woman’s identity is often riddled with a sense of insecurity…she is denied roots even in her parental family, daughters are considered paraya dhan (an alien’s wealth) and excluded from full membership of their natal families after marriage… In case of breakdown of her marriage, she can easily be turned out of that home” (1999, p. 251). In addition, women’s duties in the management of the house and the socialization of children make them crucial in cultural – as well as biological – reproduction. For this reason, cultural control over women is fundamental to the continuity of tradition and community identity. This is why women in some communities are sometimes severely punished – and in the worst cases, tortured or murdered – by their relatives for breaches of conduct that are perceived as
bringing dishonour and shame on their male relatives and community. Even in less extreme situations, so-called social customs and taboos are often used to control and oppress women. Indeed, some feminists have argued that rigid cultural values of what it is to be a ‘proper woman’ are propagated to keep women in a subaltern position.

Elizabeth Jackson’s (2010) study usefully outlines the physical deportment and appropriate social spaces that girls are taught to occupy. Restriction codes such as how a girl carries herself, taking “soft steps (long strides denote masculinity), keeping knees together while sitting, standing, or sleeping is ‘decent’, and indicates a sense of shame and modesty. ‘Don’t stand like a man’ is a common rebuke to make a girl aware of the demands of femininity” (Jackson 2010, p.177). Girls must speak softly, not laugh loudly or be argumentative. Other physical details of comportment include restrictions on girls whistling, which “signifies amorous inclination… smiling without purpose, and glancing furtively. Shyness and modesty are approved of and considered as ‘natural’ feminine qualities” (Jackson 2010, p.177). Puri (1999) also notes that ‘a curved posture’ is associated with ‘a dancing girl’ and hence girls are restricted from “leaning against a wall or a pillar…In many parts of India girls were traditionally forbidden to look into a mirror or comb their hair after sunset since these acts were associated with a prostitute getting ready for her customers” (p. 177). The heavy controls that supposedly protect female modesty place restrictions on girls’ freedom to leave the home space. “Constraints of time and space,” remarks Puri (1999) “create problems for middle class girls in terms of choice of schools, colleges and courses-coeducation and staying out till late, which certain courses demand are frowned upon in their choice of careers” (p. 123-124).

It is also notable that because Indian society continues to emphasize kin and family affiliation, individualism tends to be curtailed by existing societal and family situations. Scholars in the past have tended to focus on Indians’ socio-centric cultural understanding of volition
because it explains the distinctive features of the Indian social organization. Kakar (1981) for instance, has emphasized the strong psychological identification with the family group, as well as economic and social considerations which reinforce the family tie. Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that Indian women do not embrace the socio-centric orientation or give priority to extended-family ties to the same extent that men do: “because she must shift her allegiance from one group to another, a woman may be more likely to develop a sense of independence from any particular group” (Puri 1999, p. 106). Sangari (1993) argues that the politics of the household seem to be structured according to the degree of access women have to patriarchal power or “delegated or surrogate patriarchal roles” (p. 871). These may include control over the re-division of household labour among women (daughters, daughters-in-law, unmarried female relatives), over marriage alliances, over sons, over the behaviour of other women. In this context, abuses of power are not uncommon; indeed, Puri (1988) has pointed out that “most women in India experience family violence as the cruelty of the mother-in-law or the husband’s sisters”(p. 92). Even in the absence of outright abuse, Puri (1988) has explained the widespread maternal neglect of daughters in India (which results in a much higher survival rate for boys than for girls) as a weird expression of woman’s hostility toward womanhood and a “psychological defence of turning against the self by identifying with the aggressive male” (p. 34). The more careful nurturing of boys is also a function of the fact that an Indian woman’s major source of status, self-respect and authority has traditionally been associated with her son. Moreover, many Indian women’s economic security in old age depends on their sons, so that “ensuring their lifetime loyalty is often an enduring preoccupation”(Kakar 1989, p.279).

Regardless of the depth of Indian women’s family affiliations, Liddle and Joshi (1986) have argued that “in a male-dominated society, women are submissive to men’s needs, restrained about their own desires, dependent on, and deferent to, men” (p. 180). Delphy and Leonard (1992) in their ‘materialist analysis’ of women’s oppression contend that ‘the low value set for
women, the self-denial and masochism’ they are encouraged to develop, exist because their labour is appropriated by men. That is, “ideas and values are the effect of, and not the reason why, we do the work we do, though they are part of the means by which the exploitation is continued” (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p. 17). The particular ideologies that have been developed to reinforce male supremacy in India have tended to revolve around romanticized notions of female self-sacrifice, conveyed through films, songs, rituals and various forms of religious indoctrination. While self-sacrifice does bring religious merit and social approbation, Liddle and Joshi (1986) insist that it is also “a learned response to, and a subsequent justification for an enforced set of circumstances” (p. 203). In India it can be argued that the threat of sexual violence does keep women in their place, literally as well as figuratively, and a number of writers have noted the resulting restrictions on women’s mobility. With regard to sexuality itself, there is much common ground between the views of Western and Indian feminists, both of whom have attacked the double standard of morality, which has historically entitled men to those sexual freedoms denied to women. (Jackson 2010, Puri 1999) While in the West there has been greater acceptance of sexual freedom for women in recent decades, the double standard is now being eroded in India. As Jackson and Scott (1996) point out, this double standard has also divided women themselves into two categories: “the respectable Madonna and the rebarbative whore” (p. 3) – a binary construction critiqued by Indian feminists as well. Kalpana Viswanath (1997) has suggested, however, that in India there is relatively less concern about sexual freedom than about women’s vulnerability to sexual violence and coercion – which has, of course been an important concern for feminists everywhere.

A number of early second-wave feminists in the West developed analyses of sexual violence, which underlined the ways in which it serves as a mechanism of social control, keeping women in their place. (Brownmiller 1976, Jackson 1978) In particular, Jyoti Puri (1999) has examined the notion of sexual respectability which when internalized by women, can become ‘an
instrument of social control over their gendered bodies and sexualities: “Normative prescriptions of premarital chastity appear to be central to what counts as sexual respectability for middle-class women. These normative prescriptions are overtly linked to the premise of national cultural identity. As an Indian women, premarital non-chastity is unthinkable” (p. 115). Puri and others have also noted that in India the honour of the family is centrally located in the behaviour of women: “Izzat (family honour) seems to be a female-linked commodity. Its preservation is incumbent upon women’s behaviour alone” (number 1995, p. 115). The paradox here is that according to Puri (1999), Indian ideology “does not indicate active, desiring female sexualities, but views young girls and women as the objects or victims of male sexuality” (p. 78). In the Western context too, Jackson and Scott (1996) have argued that:

Within the dominant cultural discourses, men are cast as the active initiators of sexual activity and women as passive recipients of male advances; men’s desires are seen as uncontrollable urges that women are paradoxically expected both to satisfy and to restrain. These dynamics have been analysed in relation to a range of phenomena from everyday sexual harassment on the streets or at work, to rape. (p. 17–18)

Indian feminists in particular emphasize the problem of sexual harassment to such a degree that one is tempted to conclude that it is especially ubiquitous in India, and indeed Jyoti Puri (1999) has observed that “being slapped on the bottom, being touched on the breasts, being whistled at, being deliberately brushed against, receiving cat-calls or sexually suggestive comments – consistently appears in the narratives of…middle-class women” (p. 87). She notes that these instances provoke not only fear and anxiety among young girls but also parental concern leading to protective restrictions. Thus, “awareness of the female body is heightened in the experiences of women on a daily basis as they make the transition from childhood into adolescence and adulthood” (Puri, 1999, p. 101). Adult women in India she finds, appear to see harassment as
their responsibility; their accounts emphasize their own abilities to restrain the sexual aggression of men through “defensive strategies and avoidance mechanisms” (Puri, 1999, p. 96). This, of course translates into self-imposed restrictions on women’s freedom and mobility in public spaces. In addition to the danger of sexual aggression (both actual and perceived), Kalpana Viswanath (1997) argues that in the Indian context, the cultural ideology of purity and pollution plays an important role in controlling women’s behaviour and the spaces they can occupy. She explains that:

Purity and pollution are central categories that determine social relationships in Hindu society. Within the caste hierarchy, there are certain castes, which are considered inherently more or less pure…Within the context of women’s lives, purity and pollution take on a further dimension as these are closely linked to their sexuality and fertility. Women’s bodily experiences of menstruation, childbirth, lactation are also seen to define them as polluting or impure. (p. 315)

In his book Intimate Relations (1989), Sudhir Kakar argues that Indian social norms seek to channel women’s sexualities within the institutions of marriage and ultimately motherhood. Similarly, Vrinda Nabar (1995) notes that (most families still feel a sense of irrational horror at the thought of a daughter remaining unmarried even if “she is economically independent and seems reasonably self-contained” (p. 74). Jyoti Puri’s (1999) research appears to show that most Indian women “seem to take for granted the social mandate of marriage for women” (p. 153). Further, while there is no prescribed age for marriage, women are expected to marry young. A connection exists between the social necessity for marriage and the reportedly pervasive problem of sexual harassment in India; in particular, an unmarried woman is perceived as ‘public property’. As Liddle and Joshi (1986) explain, “any woman resisting the domestic stereotype of woman as private sexual property is defined as sexually available to anyone” (p. 184). They argue
that different forms of patriarchy present women with the distinct ‘rules of the game’ and call for different strategies with varying potential for active and passive resistance in the face of oppression. For example, the traditional Hindu joint family is a form of ‘classic patriarchy’ in which “girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband’s father. There, they are subordinate not only to all the men, but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-laws” (Liddle & Joshi 1986, p. 278). Puri (1999) argues, “while the breakdown of classical patriarchy implies that women escape the control of mothers-in-law and head their own households at a much younger age, it also means that they themselves can no longer look forward to a future surrounded by subservient daughters-in-law” (p. 28). For the generation of women caught in between, this transformation may represent a genuine personal tragedy, since they have paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal bargain, but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits. Although women make certain decisions in households and often stand up for themselves vigorously they still “suffer from their situation as subordinates, though how they interpret and react to this varies” (Katrak, 2006 p. 261).

The improvement in an Indian wife’s social status from the time of her first pregnancy has been widely noted. Kakar (1989) has argued, “the public discourse of all patriarchal societies stresses motherhood as the primary if not the sole reason of woman’s existence” (p. 143). The cultural preference for sons rather than daughters is so strong that stories of Indian women being abandoned by their husbands for their alleged inability to bear a son are not uncommon. Because of the recognition and social rewards that accompany the birth of a son, Kakar (1981) has explained that the mother may thus be inclined to indulge him “with a readiness for practically unlimited emotional investment” (p. 116). Ashis Nandy (1990) suggests that these circumstances tend to produce sons and men who idealize their mothers to such an extent that an Indian man is “more a mother’s son than a woman’s husband” (p. 36). Ashok Nagpal (2003) notes that the experience an Indian mother imparts to her daughters as infants “does not result in an equivalent
degree of idealization” (p. 61). While it is true that the intense mother-son bond is both a cause and a result of the widespread favouring of sons over daughters in India, the larger problem with the idealization of mothers is that it can create impossible demands on real women. This ideology circumscribes them within a maternal role which promotes their self-sacrifice, as Western feminists too have argued that the predominant image of the “ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing mother” is ‘a socially supported myth designed to keep women in their place” (Bassin et al. 1994, p. 3).

The issue of spatial segregation and its impact on the social and literary representations of Muslim women has been addressed by both European and postcolonial feminist theorists. During nineteenth century attacks on the Islamic deals of female chastity and seclusion became a common feature of the writings of the mainstream Western discourse. Even today they are subject to vehement criticism. Islam has remained the focus of critique of the major feminist movements in the West, which struggle for the elimination of a Muslim woman’s oppression. Spatial segregation is generally criticized as a social evil which has paralysed the better half of the Muslim population socially and economically. Western feminists have tended to criticize the public/private dichotomy as an oppressive religious construct which creates the conditions of disempowerment, humiliation and injustice for women. Regardless of the fact that “religion, be it Islam or Christianity, does not exist as an autonomous or independent phenomena. Religious rules operate or fail to operate under the restrictions of economy, social structure, culture, political system, and competing ideological predicaments” (Mojab 2002, p. 35), an inferior position of a woman within Islam is advocated. Mojab (2002) gives an example of the popular movie Not Without My Daughter. As a reference to the Eurocentric bias regarding the image of a Muslim woman, through the detailed analysis of the content of this movie, he produces evidence that the assessment of non-Muslims regarding the status of Muslim women is entirely based on religious prejudices. This linking of oppression exclusively with the religious identity of Muslim
women has resulted in their portrayal as backward, subservient figures that are chained to the
domesticity in the Western discourse. By overemphasizing the impenetrable separation between
the public and private spaces, Mojab (2002) thus believes that the link between the oppression of
Western and Eastern women is negated.

Muslim society has a pattern no doubt, but this pattern differs from country to country.
However, the basic teachings of Islam acknowledge the social dignity of a woman and the
contributions she can make towards the betterment of life in society is recognized in unequivocal
terms in Islamic Shariah. Islam gives a woman the right to inherit, she can disagree to marry
when the marriage is arranged by the parents. A woman can use the option of divorce in
unfavourable circumstances. She is entitled to claim maintenance, dowry, custody of her minor
children and is allowed to remarry: yet, the status of a Muslim woman today is mostly based on
the patriarchal traditions and feudal norms shaped by the complex interaction of multiple and
ethnic groups. Mariam Corke in her study “Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism
through Literature” (2007) gives a succinct response to the sameness of a reductive identity
ascribed to a ‘Muslim’ woman. She clarifies:

Those to whom a Muslim identity is ascribed participate in a Muslim culture and
community without necessarily accepting all of its norms and values. Muslims might be
secular, occasionally observing some ritual such as fasting for the month of Ramadan,
while not necessarily praying regularly. Muslims might even be atheists. (2007, p. 27)

She emphasizes the need to attend to the spatial politics alongside temporality as crucial and
indispensable forces for examining the contexts and complex power relations which greatly
impact the lives of Muslim women. The basic teachings of Islam acknowledge the social dignity
of a woman and the contributions she can make towards the betterment of life in society is
recognized in unequivocal terms in Islamic Shariah. The real essence of Islamic teachings with respect to the public appearance of women is that during the course of their outdoor movements, they must appear with decency and dignity. The general rules of public behaviour and morality are incumbent upon men and women alike. Just as women are obliged to guard their modesty, so are men forbidden to leer or ogle at women. There is no sound authority to convince us that Islam prescribes the total confinement and complete segregation of women. It merely lays down certain restrictions as to dress, speech and movement. Islam gives a woman the right to inherit, she can disagree to marry when the marriage is arranged by the parents, can use the option of divorce in unfavourable circumstances. She is entitled to claim maintenance, dower, dowry, custody of her minor children and is allowed to remarry: yet, the status of a Muslim woman today is mostly based on the patriarchal traditions and feudal norms shaped by the complex interaction of multiple and ethnic groups. In practice, in Pakistan like the rest of the Muslim world, women are degraded in social prestige and economic equality. They are mostly confined to domestic drudgery and completely or partially debarred from public life. Ideals of chastity and virtue are formulated in a manner that they always favour men. The bulk of the female population in the Muslim households remains under strict male domination and marriage is regarded as the ultimate objective of their lives.

Corke’s (2007) rejection of the monolithic and an essentialized identity assigned to a Muslim is also relatable to the category of a Pakistani woman. There is a great deal of difference and variation in the experiences of the Pakistani women living in each of the four provinces of the country. The geographical divisions of the country between rural and urban centres where strong economic hierarchies exist also deny the similarity of spatial experiences for Muslim Women. Therefore, the role and status of a Pakistani woman are not determined by an isolated religious ideology, but by the social, regional, economic, political and legal forces within the context where
she lives. Despite this, the patriarchal system which wields varying amounts of power over the lives of Pakistani women, offers a valid reason to study them as a unit.

Generally, the social life of Pakistani woman is centred round the division between the private and public space. The private space refers to the domestic space which is managed and organized by the women and a space of retreat for men. By contrast, the public space is usually celebrated as a masculine world. At the level of ideology, it is the patriarchal division between public and private space which determines the identities of both men and women in the Pakistani society. The male dominance over the domestic affairs of the family and its unrestrained connection with the outside world is still accepted as the conventional prototype of masculine behaviour. Ideally, the decision making powers rests in the hands of the male members of the house, and a woman can only change his decision through suggestion and request which can be ignored. The controlled movement in the outer space also causes economic and social dependency in general for the Pakistani women. Shaukat (1975) says:

The Pakistani woman enters the world at a disadvantage, for Pakistani society is culturally and in many social aspects, a patriarchal one. From the very beginning she is considered inferior to the male: boys are usually wanted by the Pakistanis family, particularly if a boy has not yet been born to the family, because male descendants are essential for the continuation of family lineage. (p. 164)

Inside the house, the Pakistani woman lives under strict male domination. The daughter of the house is perceived as a ‘visitor’ to be kept until she is married off. In a study conducted on the status of Muslim women, Haque and Aslam (2004) point towards the fact that while both sons and daughters submit to the authority of their parents, however, restrictions are placed on the mobility of the girls only, boys are allowed to move without any control. The typical image of a
Pakistani woman celebrates womanhood and motherhood inside the house. Since women are expected to be wives and mothers primarily, in less developed cities and rural areas professional education is usually perceived as an unnecessary option for the women. Shaheed and Mumtaz (1987) hold the patriarchal code of male in the society as mainly responsible for the restricted social mobility of women. An average Pakistani girl (most typically living in the remote areas of the country) gets married at a quite young age because the sexuality of a young girl is usually perceived as a threat to the family reputation. A woman’s commitment to the cultural rules of segregation and seclusion determines the status a man could command in society. A slightest deviation from the norms of ideal femininity on the part of a female can tarnish the entire family pride, which might lead to social disgrace for its male members.

The ideological demarcation of public/private spaces within a typical Pakistani setup is observed in two ways. First, inside the house separate spaces are built for its male and female members. Most often, within the rural domestic setting a portion of the house called ‘zenana’ is usually allocated for female activities privately. This reserved space is occupied only by the women of the house where only close male relatives are allowed to enter. However, the families which cannot afford to reserve separate spaces for the male and female members of the house observe this rule of gendered segregation through their physical comportments and attitudes. Second, in public places and on different social occasions like weddings or funeral ceremonies separate spaces, particular time or days are reserved for women. Given the public/private division of the social space within Pakistan, for a woman to live alone gets both socially and emotionally awkward.
2.8 Realism as Subaltern Mode of Representation

Following Eli Park Sorensen (2010), who challenges the explicit dominance of the modernist ethos in contemporary feminist and postcolonial studies—it is argued that the conventional literary forms of narration (including realist narrative mode) are either defined negatively or rejected as undesirable. This section is a theoretical study of the critique of realism in contemporary Western feminism studies and postcolonial theory. Rita Felski, one of the notable feminist aesthetic critics, in her groundbreaking study *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (1989) argues that a text constructs a mediated representation of the real and considers feminist writing both as a “medium of self-exploration and social criticism” (p. 79). This preoccupation with both these concerns are one of the reasons which have made realism a dominant mode of feminist writing. Felski (1989) further clarifies that the “the use of realist forms in a feminist context denotes a concentration upon the semantic function of writing rather than its formal and self reflexive component” (p. 79). Felski’s separation between the formal aspects of a text and feminist politics suggests that only the content of a specific text alone determines its feminist merit. This contention is the point of departure for her, for it is believed that both the form and content of the novel share a dialectical relationship and that it is the form of a narrative, which determines its meaning. Therefore, feminist analysis of the issue of divorce in the selected texts has to analyse their narrative forms.

A number of feminist critics have exhibited the ways in which gender has played an essential role in the formation and deployment of the forms of novel. Narrative form generally refers to the narrative structure. The form of the narrative is a complex process, which draws upon cultural as well as historical contexts. Challenging Ian Watts’s assumption of the qualitative inferiority of women novelists, Woolf suggested in *A Room of One’s Own* (1982) that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, though men have ruled the literary field, women novelists
have made significant contributions to the literary studies. She argues, “all the older forms of literature were hardened and set by the time she became a writer. The novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands” (1982 p. 67). Virginia Woolf (1982) takes gender as an important determinant of the formal features of the text. Exploring the limits domestic situations and responsibilities in a woman’s life, the novel form suited her better than that of drama or epic, for if “a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room. She was always interrupted. Still, it would be easier to write prose and fiction there than to write poetry or a play. Less concentration is required” (Woolf 1982, p. 67). In its essence, also, the novel was regarded and still is a form particularly suitable for women. Finding a form in which to write means in addition to choosing from available models is often marked by the perils of censorship and ideological severity. Similar to Woolf, Mary Eagleton (1996) while suggesting the role of gender in the writing process draws an interesting comparison between two famous novels—Tolstoy’s War and Peace and Jane Austin’s Pride and Prejudice. She comments, “Tolstoy may have written novels that range over half of Europe, but it was equally possible, as Jane Austen proves, to write novels that go no further than Bath” (p. 138). Nancy Armstrong’s Desire and Domestic Fiction: a political history of the novel (1987) through its investigation of novels and conduct books of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exhibits how the discourses of femininity were shaped by the writings of women. She writes that “to her went authority over the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations, and under her jurisdiction the most basic qualities of human identity were supposed to develop” (1987, p. 1). Felski (1989) also furthers Armstrong’s assertion:

It is precisely because present-day feminism has emphasized those realms of experience which are traditionally considered to lie outside the ‘political’ (that is public) domain, that the novel, as a medium historically suited to exploring the complexities of
interpersonal relations has been so prominent in the development of feminist culture. (p. 14)

Both Felski and Armstrong equate the emergence of individualism as a central feature of the domestic novel. Domestic novels invest in the creation of unique characters with individual morality and mental characteristics that do not represent any particular class rather have their own individual subjectivity. Consequently, because of its connection with real life, Woolf, Eagleton, Armstrong and Felski declare realism as the dominant tradition of women writing. Since, many women writers of the last twenty years have been concerned with addressing urgent political issues and recruiting the story of women’s lives, they have frequently chosen realist forms. This is comparable to the literary scenario of the postcolonial world towards the end of the last century. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee (1985) “the realistic novel was able to come into existence because the tension between individual and society had acquired certain intensity”(p. 99). Mukherjee (1985) has also considered the potential links between the forms of women’s writing to the social context in which they write:

Social realism at its best is conveyed in concrete and specific terms the complex relationships between individuals and their society. This relationship can be studied in sharper focus when the individual’s life is hedged in by an enclosed space, which permits very few options and when the odds are against her, in other words, when she is a woman. (p. 99)

It is worth exploring why realism (despite its intertwining with the birth of the novel) starting in the nineteenth century, aspiring to ascertain fundamental ways of relating reality with imagination, is placed low on the theoretical and the analytical scale of contemporary criticism.
But it is equally necessary to refine the simplification about their use of the ‘realism’ because, as Brunt (1970) states:

Realism’ has tended to mean widely different things depending on what qualities a particular interpreter associated with it. For example, some of the qualities more or less casually assumed to be evidence of realism include, to name a few, particularity, circumstantiality, humble subject-matter, viewpoint, chronology, interiority, externality. While each of these qualities does have some importance in realism, none of itself explains the realist convention. (p. 565)

Ash Brunt points to the ‘continual instability’ of the term realism as verified by “its unmanageable propensity to draw another qualifying term or terms, to offer some kind of semantic support”(1970, p. 1), consequently the divisions among magic realism, critical realism, social realism, etc…Associating feminist writing with realism in the Anglo-American context, Felski (1989) suggests that:

Many examples of feminist writing can be described as embracing a form of realism. It is, however, a ‘subjective’ autobiographical realism, which possesses few features of the nineteenth-century novel. The omniscient narrator is typically replaced by a personalized narrator whose perspective is either identical with or sympathetic to that of the protagonist; there is a consequent shrinking of focus from the general survey of the social world to the feelings and responses of the experiencing subject…This ‘subjective’ form of realism, centered upon the experiencing consciousness can thus incorporate the depiction of dreams, fantasies, and flights of the imagination as part of the conception of the real. (p. 82)
Felski classifies narrative omniscience as a crucial aspect of the nineteenth-century American and European realist fiction. This is closer to what Ash Brunt (1970) categorizes as social realism: “a representation of contemporary reality which is not detached and impartial, like Balzac’s, but held by some moral belief” (p. 76). In fact, towards the end of the nineteenth century, realizing that different writers present different criterion of truth, many theorists challenged the portrayal of an objective ‘reality’. For instance, Hall (1997) says: “each individual simply creates his own reality of the world” (p. 51). It is the more probable apprehension, then, which is regarded as reality, so that Brunt (1970) defines realism as “the realization of realism, the formation of an idea, however this may be attained at” (p. 72). He differentiates this ‘theoretical’ usage from the one he relates to ‘general definition’, which “still proposes by realism the representation of common experience” (1970, p. 72).

In the late 1970’s literary criticism entering into the postmodernist phase dismissed realist concern with the presentation of the simplistic/objective reality and its preoccupation with the common and ordinary life experiences. Among the notable feminist critics, Catherine Belsey and Virginia Woolf initiated this deliberate dismissal of the realist mode of narration. In “Character in Fiction”, Woolf (1982) has studied twentieth century women novelists writing in realistic mode. She states that “the tools of one generation are useless for the next” (p. 48), urging the writers to disregard the outside and work with the inside. For the general assumption which directs most of the postmodernist dialogue of the established modes of realism is that they imitate and uphold the prevailing ideology. As developed in the work of Belsey (1979) the postmodernist critique of realism raises three general objections. Firstly, it concerns with an individual experience and psychology. Fictional characters seemingly appear as typecast for their place and time: the rigorous entireties estimated through the narratives of their personal fates represent in microcosm the general totalities of their social contexts. In Catherine Belsey’s opinion, characters are usually presented as independent moral beings, which towards the end either “submit to” or
“revolt” against the social arrangements. The second major objection raised against realism was its apparent disagreement with the established order, but in reality could not endure contradiction. Especially narrative closure functions as an ideological apparatus that settled down conflicting ideologies. The position of political conviction embodied by realism creates an effect of ideological closure; if a narrative needs to challenge the established order of things, as an alternative it must take up what Belsey (1979) suggests an ‘interrogative’ form, which de-centres all presumed hegemony of political ideology.

Regardless of its challenges and confrontations of idealism with a constant portrayal of ‘what is’, the postmodern arguments question realism’s antagonism to the task of literary radicalism. However, despite their revolutionary claims, writers who employ the form of the realistic novel in the end submit to the very ideological hegemony that they initially set out to contest. Anuradha Roy’s study *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers* (1999) reveals this ambivalence about the limits of the continued use of ‘the realistic narrative mode’ in the novels written by Indian women novelists. Roy (1999) comments that “their close approximation to reality can easily create the impression of social documentaries deficient in imaginative reach and artistic sophistication” (p. 110), but implies that there is a gendered ‘prejudice’ behind such evaluation. Patriarchal assumptions of the superior worth of male experience have contributed to a systematic devaluation of their work, in common with women writers all over the world. Since most of them write about the enclosed domestic space and a woman’s perception of experience through her position in it, it is assumed that their work will automatically rank below the works of male writers who deal with weightier themes. This prejudice becomes particularly strong with women writers using the realistic narrative mode, as most of them continue to do. Towards the end of the book, Roy (1999) complains that:
While courageously dealing with sensitive areas of women’s existence, Indian women writers in English have not shown equal courage in the use of different narrative modes to challenge patriarchal ideology. In the last two decades, women writers of the West … have found alternatives to the traditional realistic pattern of women’s writing in lyrical, poetic narratives, in fantasy, in parody, in satire. On the other hand, their Indian counterparts have shown an aversion towards experimentation…The lacuna becomes even more prominent if compared with the vibrant technical experimentation of Indian male authors after Rushdie. (p. 144-145)

One of the fundamental objections raised against realism is its supposed incompatibility with resistance. Postcolonial theoretical prejudice towards realist form regards it as an extension of imperialist ideology that attempts to represent a single uniform experience. Realism is rarely recognized as an appropriate form for resistance narratives, but rather a form which reinforces the conservative ideology. This prejudice accepts magic-realism as inherently more capable of resistance. According to Soresenson (2010), this resulted in:

A critical elevation of writing perceived to be experimental or writing that plays with non-realistic form. Within postcolonial criticism, these simultaneous developments have converged in the production of a profusion of studies linking, and sometimes suggesting the interdependence of political or social resistance and non-realist fiction. If a text does not fit the profile of postcolonial resistance, as realist texts seldom do, it is generally considered incapable of subversion. (p. 33)

A great majority of the key theorists in the postcolonial literary field disapproves realism because of its apparent endorsement of the naïve impression of an unmediated thus ‘authentic’ or ‘original’ (re) presentation of the experience of Otherness, while reinforcing a monolithic view of
an imperialist discourse. Most notably, Sara Upstone disapproves and regards the use of realist forms of narration in postcolonial as a part of the imperial agenda, which sets out to create essentialized identities of the native people. Sara Upstone (2011) defines fictional realism as “an aesthetic form of consensus” (p.ix). Within the fictional domain this consensus is comparable to the colonial ideology of politics of space, underlining through the narrative a colonial ideal of a single universal reality. What Upstone (2011) takes as the “consistent, empty time” of the European novel is a setting up of the predictable world that generates the illusion of a general identity and a universal history. While, colonialism exaggerates disorder and the difference, so the realism of the traditional English novel exposes a same aspiration for dialectical approach – a step “toward the reunion of opposing codes toward a particular objective” (Upstone, 2011, p. 16), – which equally repudiates multiple interpretations. These accusations have contributed valuable reflections to the debate about the function and importance of modes of aesthetic representation.

In the hugely influential study *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* from 1978 – one of the founding texts in the field of postcolonial studies – Edward Said (1978) demonstrates how the institutions of western aesthetics and literary texts in particular, in some cases helped to sustain an ideologically distorted mode of representing cultural *Otherness*. From another perspective, Gauri Viswanathan (1990) has in the book *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* illustrated ways in which the discipline of English came into its own in an age of colonialism, and furthermore how English literature played a crucial role in supporting and developing an imperialist ideological discourse. As John Beverley (1995) sums up:

> Literature provided the British with a way of negotiating the contradictions internal to their own project between parliament, the missionaries, and the East India Company, between the colonial administration and the Indian elites in their various caste and
sectarian configurations, and between these elites in turn (who above their ethnic and religious differences could share through English literature a common model of cultural excellence and ethical superiority) and the Indian subaltern classes. What allowed it to play this mediating function in the colonies was precisely its distance as a ‘modern’, secularized, cultural practice from religious dogma and traditional cultures. (p.26–27)

The interrogation of canonical literature’s complicity with imperialist ideology forms an important perspective in postcolonial literary criticism. Simultaneously, the field has had a considerable impact on the development and critical reception of new literatures from former colonies. Indeed, following both Said’s and Viswanathan’s arguments, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin – in their influential book *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) – suggest that it is precisely the emergence of postcolonial literatures that has urged the field of literary studies to interrogate “the canonical nature and unquestioned status of the works of the English literary tradition and the values they incorporated” (p. 4). Although the process of demystifying a Eurocentric literary tradition cannot of course solely be attributed to the rise of post-coloniality, *The Empire Writes Back* points to a potential of the literary text, which to some extent is similar to what Jameson has seen as the “different ratio of the political to the personal” (Jameson 1986, p. 69); whereas the political dimension in many contemporary western novels is like a “pistol shot in the middle of a concert” (Jameson, 1986, p. 69). Jameson (1986) argues that the ‘third-world’ text clearly emphasizes on a politicized mode of representation and demands a rethinking of what is usually discussed and valorized as literary qualities. Few would disagree – as Jameson points out – that “we no longer subscribe to the belief that a literary text can be isolated from the contexts out of which it was produced, or from the historical conditions of its production.” (Jameson 1986, p. 26)

For many postcolonial critics, Jameson (1986) continues, this means that to study literary form as one’s primary purpose reinforces “imperialist politics implicit in the ‘Universalist’ claims of European literary criticism” (p. 26).
Arun Mukherjee formulates a typical view when she argues that to focus on form may lead to a Eurocentric perspective, comparing (often unfavourably) western and non-western texts, which leaves no time for dealing with the specificity of (non-western) texts. Harry E. Shaw (1999) critically notes, “realism has become not a form that can tell us about life in the modern world, but a form that can tell us nothing useful, and doesn’t even know it” (p. 29). The core thrust of this anti-realist perspective is that while ‘reality’ is not only established through an implicit referential meaning of words as such, but through the different connections between words within a specific system. The belief of a narrative employing mimetically to some external, extra-linguistic, socio-historical meaning is flawed. Since the realist text explicitly wants its readers to consider a proposed, objective structure of meaning by submitting to it in terms of a reciprocal connection – a type of automatic or expressive causality in the Althusserian sense – the realist text is seen as establishing and emphasizing an uninitiated ideological discourse. But as Shaw (1999) categorically asks: “should we assume that, unless a novel gives primary attention to meta-fictional manoeuvring, it is disguising something?” (p. 8) Homi Bhabha’s approach to realism is similar to that of Belsey – which is, realism essentially insists on an accepted, referential connection between meaning and literary signs – holds only in a very limited sense the significance of literary realism. Challenging Catherine Belsey’s blatant critique of realism, Shaw (1999) contends that she overestimates the worth of linguistic referentiality:

Reference is always associated with other linguistic means in its dealings with the world; it acts as one component of many packages …the notion that there could be a ‘referential language’, or even that language could approach a state of more or less pure referentiality, is misleading. When we refer to something, the important work remains to be done. Reference is the beginning, not the end of a process that may or may not eventuate in knowledge of the various worlds in which we live. (p. 58–59)
An important defence of realism in postcolonial criticism is made by Eli Park Sorensen (2010) in his book “Postcolonial Studies and the literary: Theory, Interpretation and the Novel” where he explicitly links the ‘monopolization of modernist ethos’ to the ‘institutionalization of contemporary postcolonial criticism’. He argues that while realism tends to dominate postcolonial writing (particularly feminist writings), most critics have been eager to promote the argument that experimental art provides the required corollary to a progressive ideology through its rebuttal of prevalent structures of representation, which remain unchallenged within the realist narrative. Sorensen (2010) says, “I argue that realism is a feasible, perhaps even an indispensable form of political and social engagement in postcolonial contexts. Such an argument is a reaction to the positioning of realism as a foil for other more ‘accepted’ forms of insurgence” (p. 7). According to Martina Michel quoted by Sorensen (2010), ‘the texts being most often canonized as representative of post-coloniality “tend to be texts that satisfy Western (post-modern) criteria of evaluation. They are experimental, make extensive use of irony, resist closure, question traditional boundaries, and employ inter-textual strategies” (p.7). The effects of the predominance of modernist ethos are scrutinised by Soresen(2010) as: “while this or that author is being praised for employing specific textual strategies that allegedly are subversive or representative within a postcolonial situation, other more conventional authors are often being ignored, and thus implicitly deemed less representative of the postcolonial” (p. 7-8).

What is alluded so far is that the aesthetic regime tacitly operating within the dominant postcolonial perspective – constructing a reductive way of reading realist modality – can be seen as a symptom of issues which are intimately related to the dimension of literary as it functions within postcolonial studies. In Jameson’s (1999) words, while postcolonial literary critics certainly can speak about realism, it is likewise the issue that it is hardly ever taken as realism but rather as something else, for example colonial fantasy or romance. Sorensen (2010) critically claims that postcolonial literary criticism typically defines realism as an objective and impartial
approach which is “complicit with the process of imperialism and therefore with Universalism, essentialism, positivism, individualism, modernity, historicism and so on” (p. 296). Questioning the agenda of this implicitly thriving postcolonial aesthetic, Sorensen (2010) counts numerous biased limitations, resided within an ideal of favoured literary forms, supposedly being textually resistant and revolutionary. Postcolonial literary criticism privileges the notion of analysing and explaining these textual potentials of subversion and transgression. Thus, utterly delineating a normative ethos of interpreting postcolonial narrative, via the tacit, fundamental aesthetic pattern of modernist and postmodernist narrative forms as assenting emancipatory ideology – whose connotation becomes even more revealing through a simultaneous negation of realism. Realism, within this context in which radical narration is repeatedly compared to political radicalism, and is consequently restrained to a particular form of production, as Carter (1992) asserts, does not seem to “provide the same pay-offs for the same amount of investment” (p. 296).

2.9 Conclusion

In the preceding sections, the study has investigated the basic rationale for what seems to be a prevalent inability among many feminists and postcolonial theorists to study, in an aesthetically sensitive way, divorce as a literary theme. This chapter has examined the postcolonial feminist theorization of space and realism. At the centre of postcolonial theoretical treatment of space is the idea of a house as embodying patriarchal ideologies that typically oppress women. An idea of space is central in determining identities. The postcolonial feminist theorists narrate that living in a place has meant confirming to the gender roles of daughter, wife and mother within postcolonial societies.

Realism as a form most commonly used in divorce narratives emphasizes and recognizes that the relation of realistic form to the content of divorce discourse has resulted in the
representative failure of divorce from mainstream literary criticism. While few postcolonial novelists have certainly worked with the structural hierarchies of imperialism by using realist mode of narration, the selected divorce narratives deal with the ‘real’ material oppressions and resistances of divorced women within India and Pakistan. What is argued, is widening of the literary and political codifications operating either tacitly or explicitly in contemporary postcolonial studies. It is vital to develop a theoretical stance which is comprehensive enough to encompass critical forms which do not apparently comply with the criteria of modernist ethos, and thus not necessarily corresponding, in an ‘agreeable’ way to the dominating socio-political dogmas promoted by postcolonial studies – literary forms such as realism, which often have been misread and caricatured by many postcolonial critics.
CHAPTER 3

MODE OF REPRESENTATION: REALISM, NARRATION AND DIVORCE DISCOURSE

3.1 Introduction

In terms of representation as a dialectical process, text and context are by no means mutually exclusive, and a narrative analysis is a significant necessary strategy in order to engage passably with both of these fundamental constituents of the fiction. In its analysis of the formal features of the selected narratives, i.e. their structural conventions, temporal and contextual settings, characterization and stylistic devices, the focus of this chapter is to determine the ideological backdrop within which the experience of divorce is contextualized in the selected postcolonial discourse. The idea behind this analysis is not to polemicise or highlight their complicity with an objective reality regarding the presentation of divorce theme, but to materialize the link between the selected novels and the socio-cultural contexts from which they emerged.

3.2 The God of Small Things (1997)

Being published in April 1997, “The God of Small Things” is chronologically divided at a specific time spanning the decades from the 1960s to 1990s. The locale of the novel is set in Kerala to bare those subtle processes through which the social forces conspired against a divorced woman to create a situation where there were “no more chances” (p. 43) for her. The theme of the novel is centred round the dilemma of Ammu’s divorced status as the prime reason behind all the tragic conflicts and happenings in her life. Opening almost at its chronological end, most of the narration, maps the perspective of one of Roy’s twinned children-protagonists, Rahel and her mother, Ammu. The decisive events of the novel—Pappachi beating and abusing Mamachi,
childhood memories of Ammu and her twin children and their unwelcome return to the Ayemenem house after Ammu’s divorce, and the death of Sophie Mol – are revealed gradually as the adult twins (Estha and Rahel) meet more than twenty years later. Conversing Anuradha Roy’s general observation about Indian novelists’ common use of traditional modalities to narrate their writings, Roy’s narration stands apart from the stereotypical discourses of the Indian canon. Although the mode of realism underlines the whole of Roy’s narration, Alex Tickell (2007) argues that in The God of Small Things, like Ammu’s deferred choice of a proper surname for her children, “Roy’s novel resists categorization and draws together elements of the fairy tale, psychological drama, pastoral lyric, tragedy and political fable” (p. 3).

Roy’s novel can generally be categorized as ‘realist’ in the way that it aims to generate the impression of realism in its portrayal of a particular social environment, which Rao and Menon (1997) define as “the acute form and awareness of the social forces that surround the individual, their power to influence the lives of men and women for better or for worse – and the overall interaction of the individual and society” (p. 125). The story of The God of Small Things is based on Roy’s personal experiences. In an interview posted on Roy’s home page, she says that, “a lot of the atmosphere of The God of Small Things is based on my own experiences of what it was like to grow up in Kerala”. Bred and raised in Kerala, Arundhati Roy is the daughter of a Syrian Christian mother, Mary Roy, and a Bengali Hindu father. Mary Roy took divorce from her Hindu husband when Roy and her brother were quite young. Mary Roy with her twin children returned to her ancestral house in Kerala, however, Roy admits that because of the divorce, she was never “fully accepted back into the conservative world of rural Kerala, and Ammu’s oppression as a divorcée in The God of Small Things may reflect the emotional texture of Mary Roy’s ‘shameful’ return after her failed marriage” (Tickell 2007, p. 27).

Roy’s story is influenced not only by her own personal experiences but also by surrounding social and cultural forces “the political awareness and sensitivity to social injustice in
*The God of Small Things* can also be traced back to Roy’s childhood, and the example of her mother’s uncompromising feminism and social activism” (Tickell, 2007, p. 29). Roy’s narration emphasizes the interconnectedness of the private and public. Whereas, the narrative for the most part engages with Rahel and Ammu’s memories and experiences, the details of the political and cultural developments of the time wherein the novel is set becomes a site of renegotiating postcolonial culture. It provides a background of the social relations and links the present with the past, indicating the areas which weakens the position of the woman. It is both the process of recollection that transforms Ammu’s past into a narrative and the process of investing all familiar places and objects with an identity-constructing recognition that the meaning of the present comes together through the action of remembering the past. This circular effect is enhanced in the narration by the recurrence of phrases, expressions or songs, apparently out of context sometimes, but which point out a web of connections that retrospectively confer significance on dispersed recollections. In this sense, continuing reverberation of the past in Estha and Rahel’s adult lives and their troubled return to Ayemenem almost reverses the genre’s conventional progressive pattern, leading some reviewers to describe Roy’s third-person narrative as an ‘anti-Bildungsroman’ in which the main protagonists never properly grow up. In opposition to the linearity of time, Roy makes use of memory as a narrative device, which goes over the same places and collects even the smallest details in its invocation of Ammu’s subaltern divorced status.

Roy’s narrative shares the conviction that the identity of a divorced woman cannot be separated from her gender identity as well as the social and historical context of its construction. Her narration is a rich cornucopia of intricate analyses of and insights into the ways in which society holds patriarchal oppression and is impregnated with the constitution of subalternity for its divorced female characters. Roy poses a question in the course of her narration, “what was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? It was what she was battling inside her. An unmixable mix.
The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber”(1997, p. 44). Roy makes reminiscence of the past a significant feature of the text. The flashback technique is used more than a mere device for reiteration of the past, but to suggest how that past experiences of Ammu’s life shaped the present course of her as well as twin children’s life. Memory becomes a suitable instrument for the detection of the identity of the divorced woman. Though, memory is vital to the development of character and plot, but the process of reminiscence is rarely ordered like a conventional narrative, tending instead to be repetitious, digressive and continually triggered by little events, ordinary things. Indeed, this sifting, beachcombing return over the ground of memory shapes the structure of The God of Small Things as a whole, and the process through which ‘remembered’ small things become “the bleached bones of a story”, is one of the prominent feature of the novel. (Tickell 2007, p. 4) This is particularly apparent from Roy’s creation of Ammu’s counterpart Chacko –as a male divorcée even though Ammu worked as much as Chacko did in the factory, she would not inherit anything from her parents because daughters did not inherit. Chacko, aware of his power over women as a man, mocked Ammu that she had no “Locusts Stand I” (Roy 1997, p. 57), and declared “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (Roy 1997, p. 57). They were the men who ruled the Keralalite society, as is evident from Chacko’s sole ownership of Mammachi’s pickle factory. The factory was, until the day Chacko returned from Oxford Mammachi’s factory; however, on his return he became the owner of the factory.

Memories of Ammu’s early childhood, marriage and tragic return to the Ayemenem house elaborate the idea that her identity and experience of divorce were shaped socially, changing according to the historical and cultural context. These recollections are frequently inserted in the narrative before the related events in the story are actually evoked. Ammu’s marginal position was visible from her childhood memories, which were full of remorse. As a child, Ammu remembered her father giving charity to orphan houses and leprosy clinics, and was known as a
generous and kindhearted person, but “alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relatives for having such a wonderful husband and father” (Roy 1997, p. 180). It was this suffocating atmosphere that Ammu longed to escape from and entered into a hasty marriage expecting to escape the paternal bouts even when she knew that “choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name didn’t give a woman much of a choice” (Roy 1997, p. 37). Ammu’s only motive to enter into a hasty marriage was that “she thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (Roy 1997, p. 39).

Ammu’s graphic recollections of her husband’s ‘beating and battering’ suggest the abuses that she faced in her married life. However, internalizing the ethos of the society that expected a wife to be all sacrificing and compromising to make marriage work, Ammu patiently suffered his husband’s tortures. What eventually became the reason for her breakup was the threat that she faced towards her sexuality. She refused to complicit her husband’s idea of sexually entertaining his English boss to secure his tea-estate job. She remembered that “she said nothing. He grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort” (Roy 1997, p. 42). Therefore, within the world whose entire social fabric was woven round a woman’s chastity, Ammu had no other choice except to leave her husband’s house and to make an unwelcome return to Ayemenem house.

Roy makes the social undesirability of divorce for a woman as the central theme in The God of Small Things. Ammu being a Syrian Christian knew that marrying a Hindu was not allowed in her religion but she not only married but also divorced her husband, which was against the social norms of Kerala, because she couldn’t defile her honour. The reality of divorce in the life of a woman is suggested in these lines which set forth Ammu’s conscious internalization,
“She was twenty-seven that year, and in the pit of her stomach she carried the cold knowledge that for her, life had been lived. She had had one choice. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man” (Roy 1997, p. 38). Ammu lived in a society where women were encouraged to believe that marriage would turn them in blessed souls but the reality was opposite. In the words of Oakley (1981) it is precisely “marriage that oppresses, suppresses and depresses them” (p.241).

Roy uses the image of adultery to puncture the cultural expectation, which supposes a wife to defer to her husband’s wishes, even if it comes to gamble her own sexuality. Ammu’s refusal to indulge in an adulterous relationship finally lead her to divorce. This harsh reality shattered Ammu who was physically vulnerable, even within the secure structure of marriage. Ammu rebelled in two ways. One of them was to opt for a divorce, imposing her presence (together with her twins) to her own blood family, demanding from them the material support her husband was supposed to grant. For a while, she almost succeeded in conquering some space for her small family, in this improvised, deviant household. Her second rebellious attitude and one for which she paid dearly, was to refuse a sexless, body-less identity only because she was a divorced mother. Valutha, her untouchable lover, is the assertion of her female desire and her right to live on passionately after divorce. Therefore, Ammu’s involvement in an extramarital relationship with Valutha can be taken as a refusal to submit to society’s social dictates. The desire of having her own house that made Ammu enter into the marriage had to be abandoned for she refused to accept the role of a ‘veshaya’. Looking at the photos of her wedding day, Ammu had a feeling of staring at the pictures of some other woman:

A foolish jeweled bride. Her silk sunset-colored sari shot with gold. Rings on every finger. White dots of sandalwood paste over her arched eyebrows. Looking at herself like this, Ammu’s soft mouth would twist into a small, bitter smile at the memory—not of the wedding itself so much as the fact that she had permitted herself to be so painstakingly
decorated before being led to the gallows. It seemed so absurd. So futile. Like polishing firewood. (Roy 1997, p. 43-44)

Roy also makes an extensive use of irony throughout the novel. Looking at her wedding photographs, Ammu felt the woman who stared back at her was some other woman. Roy’s passage expresses not only the depressed mental state of her character, but also criticizes the embellishment of an Indian bride as an indicator of the transient nature of a woman’s identity. Ammu’s dilemma then, is one in which her body became a gendered sign of both aspiration and humiliation, and the terrible price of her refusal to prostitute herself in the conventional colonial setting of the tea plantation is her conversion into a ‘shameful’ figure in the patriarchal Syrian-Christian community. The shame choked her. The realization of her mistake came up when she displeasingly entered the Ayemenem house, where “Pappachi would not believe her story, not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he didn’t believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (Roy1997, p. 42). Ammu’s rejection by her family turned her nearly mad. She couldn’t escape her past. Roy’s use of dreams becomes the most graphic example of Ammu’s inevitable confrontation with her past:

She had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snicking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they’d caught in the bazaar—branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were. Veshyas. So, that new policemen on the beat would have no trouble identifying whom to harass. Ammu always noticed them in the market, the women with vacant eyes and forcibly shaved heads in the land where long, oiled hair was only for the morally upright. (Roy 1997, p. 161)
Ammu always had this dream. Ammu’s recurring mysterious dream can be interpreted as prophesying the future, a way in which the Ammu’s unconscious declared the futility of all her efforts to live a normal life after divorce.

3.3  My Feudal Lord (1994)

History, religion, and politics: all make a major impact on Durrani’s narration of her personal divorce experience in her autobiographical novel, My Feudal Lord. Durrani’s words from ‘Epilogue’ provide a proleptic insight into the greatest challenges that the publication of her personal story had brought with it because of its explicit confrontational content. When the novel was first published in 1990 Pakistan, it led to great controversial debates on the national level. The period was particularly remarkable for its censorship of a woman’s work. In her words, “many said that it was scandalous, publicity seeking rubbish. Some called it obscene and pornographic. No-one in Pakistan, however, doubted its accuracy” (p. 380). Durrani’s ironic confession that nobody has dismissed the accurateness of her account is significantly important in developing the understanding of the historical context within which she has placed her story of divorce.

The temporal span of the narrative can fairly be dated from 1974 to 1989 and is for the most part set in different cities of Pakistan. It was a period of great political disturbance in the history of Pakistan that makes the novelist to classify it as “a male-dominated Muslim society” (p. 333). After twenty seven years of independence in 1977, the democratic government of the country was dissolved by internal military take over. During the following year, General Zia-ul Haq had taken over the hold of the national politics in his capacity as the president of Pakistan. During his time, Islam was used as a weapon to ensure the sanctity of his policies that affected both the public and private lives of Pakistani citizens. Most of the political measures taken by Zia’s government strengthened the structures of power which undeniably empowered men,
politically and personally. In the wake of extreme religious fanaticism of Zia’s regime, the false propaganda of Islamization created an atmosphere that was manifestly hostile towards women’s claims of equal personal, social, legal and professional rights. Since, marriage- husband and children- were considered the primary focus of a woman’s life and identity, slight availability of opportunities facilitated passivity and economic dependence of the female section of the society. Part of the problem arose from the changes in the law of evidence related to family issues sanctioned by Majlis-e-Shoora that had noticeably discriminated women in matters related to marriage, divorce, criminal punishment, child-custody, job security, inheritance and property rights. According to Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) the announcement of Hudood Ordinance 1979 on 12 Rabiul Awal (a day, which holds great religious significance for the Muslims) is the concrete example of the misogyny which women suffered during that period. Then, there is little wonder that the critics accused Durrani’s fictional venture which details the accounts of adultery and rape as an explosive idea. In response to the harsh criticism that aroused immediately with the publication of her novel, Tehmina admits, “when I decided to write this book, I was aware of the perils of exposing the details of my private life to a male-dominated Muslim society. But I had to cast aside my personal considerations in favour of the greater good” (p. 233). With the publication of My Feudal Lord, Tehmina suggests to have re-established control over her life. Commenting upon her venture to fictionalize her divorce experience, she speaks out boldly:

Our closed society considered it obscene for a woman to reveal her intimate secrets, but would not silence be a greater crime? Silence condones injustice, breeds subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy. Mustafa Khar and other feudal lords thrive and multiply on silence. Muslim women must learn to raise their voices against injustice. For me, conventional politics was no longer the answer. In Pakistan, the system is merely used to hoodwink further those who are already exploited. I realized that I could do no greater service for my country and our people than to expose the camouflage. I was
determined not to waste the thirteen years of my life. I decided to cast a stone at hypocrisy. I decided to write this book and break the traditional silence. (Durrani 1994, p. 374-375)

As this quote suggests, the strength of feudal system lay in its control over the voice of the oppressed. It censored the production and distribution of knowledge that could lead to resistance. When society discourages self-expression and self-exploration, it discourages attention to symptoms of discontent and shield social ideologies and institutions from probing examination and oppositional activism. Therefore, Tehmina’s decision to publish the novel became her deliberate confrontation with the oppressive ideologies of orthodox society. This is what Guha (1987) argues that “when a victim, however timid, comes to regard herself as an object of injustice, she already steps into the role of a critic of the system that victimizes her (note the feminine pronoun). And any action that follows from that critique contains the element of a practice of resistance” (p. 165). When she wrote her autobiographical fiction, exhorting women “to raise their voices against injustice” (p. 375), she faced strong social reprisal and familial alienation for transgressing the limitations that the male dominated society had proscribed her to cross.

The novel opens with Tehmina’s memory of the Punjab club in Lahore where the Spanish Consulate held a grand reception to celebrate its national day. Tehmina remembered her life as a young, beautiful and seductive woman, a twenty-one year old female, who had quit her education at the age of eighteen to marry a junior executive. She was happy to attend such a lavish party with her husband. Wearing her pale-green chiffon sari with braided plait of long auburn hair, it was the day when her life took a sudden turn when she was hypnotically drawn to Mustafa’s vicious gaze “like a moth to flame” (p. 21). Durrani’s opening of the narration with this particular memory also reveals the fact that the complicity of the feudal system with colonial culture was
neither redundant nor accidental. The novelist gives no direct description of the event as such, yet conspicuously refers to the abstract and immediate manifestations of colonialism on national politics and culture.

Much emphasis is placed on the mimicry and the integration of European style and manners in the life of elite class, which implies Durrani’s persistence on the inequality and the distance between the rulers and masses. Tehmina’s references to Mustafa’s love for *Samile Row* suits and *Turnball and Asser shirts*, foot wears from *Wallington* to crocodile style, sleazy dinner parties with French food and a connoisseur of fine wines “where women were part of the menu” (p. 49), and travelling in a cavalcade of shiny American made-cars suggest the luxuries of power and status enjoyed by the elite class of the country. The hypocrisy of the political leaders of the time is further exposed through their artful tactics with which they fooled the emotional and uneducated masses of the country. One such example is to found in Mustafa’s oratorical promises of taking the wealth “from the rich and give to the poor in a system where opportunities were more equal and where resources were more equitably distributed” (p. 58).

The structural details of the buildings raised in the cultural city of Lahore during the Imperial rule establish the hybridized split in the Pakistani society. Durrani says “in the spacious halls and shaded patios of the Punjab Club, I could sense the atmosphere of the British Raj that had ended twenty seven years earlier with independence” (Durrani 1994, p. 17-18). Durrani says that at the end of British rule in 1947, the Indian sub-content was divided along religious lines and the Muslims won Pakistan in the name of Islam. In reality feudal system rose to power with only lip service to democratic principles. Tehmina’s reference to the country’s colonial past and its role in solidifying the feudal powers suggest the importance of history in identity formation. Chris Weedon (2004) in her study *Culture and Identity: Issues in Cultural and Media Studies* also suggests that the narrative of hegemonic and marginalized are constituted in history. Weedon
(2004) says “narratives of the past that depict a collective experience for marginalized groups have important social, ideological and political roles” (p.169). Therefore, Durrani’s reference to the colonial history of Pakistan informs that the present hierarchies within the social structure of the society are the legacy of the colonial past. This holds true both at the level of national and individual history. Thus, the narrative effectively hints upon the structural inequalities and power structures which were prevalent in the country. Durrani’s idea of ‘independence’ as a relatively little move from direct to indirect rule is quite comparable to Robert J.C Young’s (2003) idea of independence, which according to him involve “a transfer of power not to the people of the newly sovereign country but to local elites who inherited the whole colonial system” (p. 99). The novelist insists that politics in the country had little to do with the desperation of the poor masses, but was a clout to bring “legitimacy, power and protection” (p. 43), to the feudal section of the society. Shaheed and Mumtaz (1987) take the feudal system as the legacy of colonial system which particularly put women at a disadvantage:

Contrary to the popularly held belief among some sections, colonization did not necessarily improve the participation and position of women in society. For one thing, the British actually reinforced feudal and tribal structures in the rural areas and by giving the feudal landlords and tribal heads absolute ownership of the land, increased their own power and that of the elite. This reinforced pre-existing feudal and tribal cultures, strengthening the subordination of women in those areas. (p.36)

Durrani believes that female identities undergo constant transformation under the influence of the feudal system. The immediate explanatory passages of the feudal system at the start of My Feudal Lord, especially provides a hinge with regard to the multiplicity of oppressions that Tehmina faced in her position as the wife of a prominent politician who came from feudal background. The most quintessential introduction of the feudal system is given by the novelist in these words:
The feudal system is a carry-over from the time when the British ruled the whole of south central Asia. By bestowing land and absolute power upon certain ‘loyal’ individuals, the ‘white masters’ were able to control the country’s multitudes with little effort. With the passage of time the privileged few multiplied their wealth by exploiting the feudal practices of tenant farming and arbitrary taxation. Feudalism was a license to plunder, rape and even murder. The rich got richer; the poor despaired. (p. 40)

The chief weakness of this system in the words of the novelist lay in its juridical authority over the legal system, the factor which resulted in the social and emotional exploitation of the powerless. The whole narrative provides a staggering number of incidents in which only the rich could benefit from the law of the state. This is perhaps easier to observe in the life of Dai Ayesha, where Durrani bares the inefficacy of the law of justice in Pakistan. The traditional jirga system was used locally by the feudal system to settle the disputes without any interference of the courts of law. Customarily, the feudal system gave the feudal lord an arbitrary and unconditional right to resolve the disputes of his subjects, most typically in rural settings “whereby the feudal lord acts as judge and jury to settle disputes among his vassals out of court. Sentences are passed by consensus or merely on the lord’s authority” (p. 45).

Somewhere in the middle of narration Tehmina relates in detail the tragedy of their old family servant- Dai Ayesha. Despite her poor background and lowly menial job, she was a woman of exceptional beauty. When young, she was convicted of adultery in her instance of eloping with a married man, Mustafa in his authority as village head “committed Ayesha’s lover to an asylum, where he soon grew mad and died. But Ayesha was installed as Bilal’s dai (nanny)…and was like numerous others, a household slave” (p. 46). The unfortunate fate of Dai Ayesha provides an ironic contrast to the incompetency of law to challenge the adulterous acts of a feudal male when he transgressed the ethical and legal boundaries of the society. Later, when in
a social gathering when the wives of two businesspersons taunted Tehmina for her illicit relationship with Mustafa as “married women who have affairs with married men were sluts” (p. 65), Mustafa used his powers to silence any criticism. The following day Mustafa summoned the husband’s of the two women in the Governor House and threatened them, as “I want your wives to go to Tehmina and apologize. Today. If they don’t, I won’t take it lightly. You will pay the price for their insults. You can go now”(p. 78). The men could not defy the order of their ruler and their wives went to Tehmina’s place and made the required apologies, especially when under the Hadood Ordinance “a woman could be stoned for adultery in Pakistan. That is not the reality. The Koran states that four witnesses to the actual penetration must be present or that one of the participants must publicly confess” (p. 68). Durrani’s depiction of the difference with which feudal system tackles the alleged moral transgressions of the two women (from altogether different social classes) hints at the strong social and political forces which misuse Islamic injunctions only for their personal gains. At the same time, the use of different religious ceremonies and rituals within the narrative suggest a lack of understanding of Islamic traditions as a serious problem which the Pakistani society faces.

Within this system of feudal activity to accumulate land and control, women experienced powerlessness in their relationship with men. This feudal mentality barred women from exercising their intellects and energies outside their homes. Even women in the most privileged class were the ones who could only talk “endlessly about disobedient servants, clothes, jewellery and interior decorations… many a day in the lives of these women was almost devoted to the topic of what to wear”(p. 65). Their considerable participation and presence in the political parties were limited only to their role as the objects of male sexual desire. As the narrator demonstratively points out that, “the men in our new circle took delight in discussing the intricacies of the dancer’s movements –on the floor and in the bed- and spoke openly of the rates they charged for the night. The wives suppressed their feelings and pretended to treat these
discussions as harmless male fantasies” (p. 60). Apparently, the narrative seems to mock an elite class woman’s obsession with looks, clothes, fashion, makeup and other trivial details of appearance, in reality it evokes their desperate situation as the creatures seen by, and for men; the object of male fantasies, explorations and articulations. In Durrani’s view, this indulgence was quite meaningful on the ground that the stability of their relationship depended upon the sexual pleasures they could proffer to their husbands.

In a world where beauty and charm of a woman made her powers, the birth of dark-skinned daughter-Tehmina was a shock for her fair-skinned mother. During the growing years of her life, Tehmina confronted the trauma of her ‘dark skin’ which put her in isolation and complex. Her mother was not much fond of her and felt “embarrassed to present me to friends and relatives. Even as a baby, I felt my inadequacy” (p. 23). The narrative also recounts the memories of her loving grandmother who always tried to help Tehmina combat her unattractiveness, which all the more ingrained in her the feelings of inadequacy:

Her emphasis on my appearance brought out the worst reactions in me. ‘Parents like pretty children’, she would say. ‘Your mother will love you more if you are looking nice’. Waving her hands in despair at my rejection of her plans for my beautification, she would suggest, ‘Put your hair over your ears. It looks nicer’. Or, ‘Put some Kajal (kohl) over your eyes; they stand out more’. Poor grandmother never realized how deeply the complex of being ugly was setting in – how much would it affect my life. (p. 27)

For Tehmina growing up visibly different from the rest of her sisters had deep effects on her personality and sense of identity. While the teen years of her life miraculously lightened the dark pigments of her skin, the complex of being ugly exceptionally affected her future life. However, a sense of inferiority which Tehmina had internalized in her childhood, fed by the little attention
from her family lead Tehmina to look for alternative routes. Firstly, her low self-esteem was quickly flattered by Anees’s quirky attention. She mistook him as her “only chance for happiness and speedy escape” (p. 33). Tehmina was educated at the Catholic Convent School Murree, where she was sent to live in a hostel. Keen to escape a childhood and adolescence overdetermined by the deprivation of ‘mother-daughter relationship’, she decided to marry at a young age. Her marriage to Anees at the age of eighteen was literally a process of running away from the stigma of ugliness. Her petulant reflection (three days prior to the wedding) that “I was already bored by Anees. I did not love him enough and most definitely did not want to marry him”(p. 37), subtly draws attention to the dislike she felt for the man she was to marry. Immediately, with the birth of her little daughter, her marriage began to founder with the ordinary routine of her daily life. Her sense of vulnerability in the face of her parents’ high social background as compared to Anees’s family, lead her to deny her marital relationship. The text offers insights to the psychological damage that ‘unbelonging’ causes her:

When my daughter Tanya was born, I was not only bewildered, but puzzled at having become a mother, understanding little of the woman into which I was developing. Emotionally, I was hopelessly immature, as I struggled to cope with what should have been the most rewarding relationships between mother and daughter ….I still did not love Anees. If I had, perhaps I would have found Mustafa Khar less intriguing and less troubling. (p. 38)

These flashbacks help the reader to understand her seduction by Mustafa Khar. It was not Tehmina as an individual but her exceptional physical attractiveness that turned Mustafa into her capricious lover. On a pretext of her friend’s warning of Mustafa’s capricious nature, to test his love Tehmina dressed herself in a silly Bo-Peep dress for a dinner party hosted by the Chief Minister of Sind. To her utmost dismay, Mustafa completely ignored her for the evening and
started flirting with the most attractive women present at the gathering. The fact that he was ostensibly crazy only for her ‘appearance’ can be seen in his verbal threat to Tehmina “I love you for what you are...if you become a completely different person, I might change my mind” (p. 81). As the narration furthers, when the advanced years of Tehmina’s life brought sobriety in her appearance; Mustafa’s involvement with her beautiful sister Adila bore testimony to the actuality of his statement.

Tehmina’s narcissistic approach to marriage and divorce illustrates that much of the oppression that she had suffered was because of the patriarchal attitudes that misinterpreted Islam for suppressing women. In her narration, Tehmina did not account Islam for the oppression she faced in her life rather her presentation of the issue of divorce is mainly based on the assumption that all her troubles were the result of disregard and misinterpretation of Islamic principles. Tehmina’s narration details the prudence and value of Islamic teachings that people misinterpret for their petty gains. Mustafa’s callous nature was tempered by in an environment where male dominance was most customary. To assert his unquestioned authority, he intentionally referred only to the selected verses of Quran:

His values were steeped in a medieval milieu, a mix of prejudices, superstitions and old wives’ tales. High on the list was the role of the wife. According to the feudal tradition, a wife was honour bound to live her life according to her husband’s whims. A woman was like a man’s land-‘The Koran says so’, he said. This was a revealing simile. A feudal lord loves his land only in functional terms. He encloses it and protects it. If it is barren, he neglects it. Land is power, prestige and property. I interpreted Quran differently. To me land had to be tended and cultivated; only then could it produce in abundance. Otherwise, it would be barren. But, of course, I was expected to accept Mustafa’s interpretation without question. (p. 107)
To relate Islam inextricably with subjugation was to overlook the actuality of misinterpretation of the holy text. From start to end, Durrani’s narration elaborates the idea that women’s status and roles in Muslim societies, as well as patriarchal structures and gender relationships, are a function of multiple factors, most of which have nothing to do with religion. Tehmina states that the oppression she suffered in her married life was the consequence of the patriarchal attitudes that misinterpret Islam for suppressing women. It is the social and cultural barriers more than anything which have been listed by the narrator as the major impediments to the liberation of divorced women. Therefore, Tehmina Durrani’s publication of her life writing offers testimonies to the experience of living under a typical patriarchal society that continues to marginalize the voice and plight of a divorced woman in Pakistan.

3.4  **Typhoon (2003)**

While *My Feudal Lord* substantiates the dialogic interconnection of colonial and feudal powers within the cultural fabric of the Pakistani society, in *Typhoon* the colonial forces are never explicitly mentioned in the projection of Naghmana’s experience of divorce. The main thrust of the narration remains exclusively on the forces of patriarchy as an ever-present weapon of intimidation, which conditioned its female protagonist towards passivity. Shahraz’s assumption of patriarchy’s disciplining character is strengthened by Naghmana’s subjection to the despotic authority of the village *buzurgh* in the village *kacheri*, which ultimately cost her life.

*Typhoon* is divided into four sections, each further divided into several short chapters of unequal length. Shahraz’s narration is not linear, but circular, constructing meaning by going over and over the same incident to present different points of view; similarly memory focuses on disjointed recollections, shedding light not only on the past, but also on the interpretation of the present. The locale of *Typhoon* is Chiraghpur, which is a remote village of interior Sindh. Structurally divided in four parts, first and last parts of the narration are set in the present,
whereas part three and four enacts the memories of the past. The narrative thus moves into two
directions, first set in ‘present’ full of reminiscence and remorse, then towards past, then
ultimately towards the outcome of the tragedy, the occasion of Baba Siraj Din’s death, the time
when “bitterly it dawned” on Naghmana “that it was now her husband’s kacheri she was
attending. Not the old man’s. Now Jahangir was the judge” (p. 335).

_Typhoon_ is a third person account of the two brief visits of a young urban woman named
Naghmana to Chiraghpur; first in May 1982 and then in May 2002. Unlike _My Feudal Lord_,
which makes direct references to the impact of national politics on the status of woman in
Pakistani society, Qaisra Shahraz in her novel _Typhoon_ has restrained from making any explicit
reference to the role of national politics on the life of her female protagonist. However, the
significance of ‘May 1982’ as the time of Naghmana’s first visit to the village cannot be
dismissed. Outwardly and superficially, the date of her female protagonists visit to Chiraghpur
may signify a random choice of temporal fixity. Yet, the choice of the time is not as simple as it
appears to be. Shahraz’s choice at once fictional and historical is obviously suggestive of the
novelist’s creative imagination and needs careful study, to unfold the real meaning of the novel.
A reader familiar with Pakistani history knows that the geo-temporal specificity of the novel is
the reflector of the narratorial consciousness of the misogynous phase of Pakistani society when,
in the words of Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987), “female visibility was equated with obscenity”(p.
82).

Shahraz’s novel is a tacit exposure of the reality of ‘Islamic morality’ campaign launched
by the government and more specifically the degrading effects it had on the life of an urban
woman. It was not only “a woman’s right to dress as she wanted was negated, her right to drive a
car was questioned in the Sindh assembly” (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987, p. 73). While there is no
doubt that the problem of obscenity is valid in itself, the issue as defined by the government
seemed to equate women per se with obscenity. As such, government’s campaign was viewed by WAF and other women just as an attempt to reduce women’s visibility in public. (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987) On April 1982, Khânâninm Siddique Rajai, widow of the late Iranian president visited Pakistan and was given extensive coverage in the national press. Rajai herself dressed according to Iran’s official prescription, her face only visible from within her black chador, presented Iran’s interpretation of the status and rights of women in Islam. To this Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) comments:

Whether Siddique Rajai’s presence in Pakistan and General Zia-ul-Haq’s decision to present the 16 women members of the Majlis-e-Shoora with chadors was mere coincidence or whether Zia’s act was inspired by the Iranian example, is a matter of speculation. Certainly, Zia decided to make a personal contribution to chador issue by presenting chadors to the Majlis women, during Rajai’s visit, on April 1982. That this was a conscious decision to promote the chador is evident from the fact that he presented all male members material for shalwar kameez, a gift equally appropriate for women. Zia’s gesture of presenting chadors was to become a habit; he subsequently presented women with chadors wherever he went, in colleges, schools, to nursing associations, etc. (p. 31)

Women bore the brunt of this campaign because it appeared to be giving everyone the license to pass judgment on the ‘morality’ of women in public places, the prime indicator of which seemed to be women’s apparel and presence. There appeared to be no way in which this could be countered, since “Islam as expounded by the illiterate maulvis and obscurantist sections of society, seemed to consist of a series of cosmetic changes rather than any fundamental changes in the infrastructure of the society” (Mumtaz & Shaheed 1987, p. 72). The problem was not actually that of directives themselves, but the encouragement it gave to men to unjustly impose their subjective code of dress on women.
The trope of *chador* is the recurrent feature of the whole narration in *Typhoon*. Since, Shahraz’s protagonist had lost her husband for not covering her head; it is worth looking into this trope in detail. The *chador* is simply a length of cloth, the length and width of which varies. Traditionally it has been worn in South Asia over the tunic and a variety of tight or loose trousers, and was worn covering the head and upper portion of the body. It acted to disguise the contours of a woman’s body. Over the years the urban *chador* dwindled in size to merely a piece of cloth draped around one’s neck, having very little to do with modesty of a woman. In the late 1960s and 70s, many fashionable Pakistani women stopped wearing *duppata* altogether. If upper class urban women appeared to be making great strides forward, the women remained tied to ‘traditional’ culture in the rural areas of the country. Cut off from the dynamic forces operating in the urban centres, rural culture remained firmly rooted in the traditional lifestyle. Because colonization increased the gulf between the anglicised sub-culture in urban centres and the traditional culture in the rural areas, the conservative culture of the latter (actually reflecting the needs of the rural structures of power) was perceived of being more indigenous, and that ‘indigenousness’ continued to be associated, as it had been for centuries with Islam.

While remaining specific to the rural world of Chiraghpur, the narrative does not access Naghmana’s urban background. The only information that the reader gathers about her is somewhere in the middle of the story with a statement that “the advertising company she worked for had granted her a special leave to spend in rural Sindh with her beloved aunt.” (p. 240) She was a representative of the city woman and her appearance was merely the product of the culture she came from. Nowhere is another line for or about her family background. Overall Shahraz’s description of Naghmana’s character is limited to the details of her physical appearance. The logic behind this choice is codified in the words of novelists when she writes “appearances were very important” (p. 142).
Appearance, in Chiraghpur, was both a category of cultural identity and symbolic bearer of a woman’s morality. This is made evident at the very onset of the narration when the eldest granddaughter of Baba Siraj Din was introduced to the readers as, “dressed in her habitual black veil, the burqa. Their Holy Woman.”(p. 5). She symbolized the desired image of the village women. Within the little world of Chiraghpur, not a single female character; married or unmarried, young or old, rich or poor, educated or uneducated was found with a bare head in public places. Shahraz’s village women seemed to be holding Tehmina Durrani’s dictum in My Feudal Lord when she says “appearance, especially that of a woman, matters” (p. 300), within the public life of Pakistan.

Most noticeably, it was through visits of two notorious village gossip mongers- Kulsoom-the village matchmaker and the cook, Niamet Bibi to the different houses of the village that the reader gets to know the traditional ethos of the village life, which took sexuality as an extremely shameful and taboo topic. It was not only Baba Siraj Din, who took Naghmana’s bold appearance as an indication of the loose morality, but even the women of the village mistook her modern demeanour as a tempting tactic to ensnare the men of the village. Accidently, the moment enraged Hajra entered into the courtyard of Naghmana’s aunt to complain against her, the two women were privy to the whole drama. The two women were comically delighted at peering over the ‘wonderful tamasha’ as “no instance of adultery had ever been brought to light in their village before” (p. 51). Desperate to spread the news throughout the village, however, the sympathies of both the woman sided with their village woman. In this respect, the words of Kulsoom Bibi were the exact clue to the reaction of the whole village, which was to come later in the story: “When I saw the slut with her open hair, flaunting her shameful body in front of everyone, with just a flimsy rope of a dupatta draped around her neck, and no other covering whatsoever, I knew for sure that she was the bearer of immorality to our village”(p. 51). Thus, Shahraz suggests that the appearance of a woman is not something personal to her, but a matter subject to public scrutiny in
terms of its implications and effects. This account is pertinent to Naghma’s experience of divorce on several counts. The aforementioned argument has an organic connection with the opening of the novel.

The opening of the novel orchestrates a grandiose, melancholic occasion of the dying of the revered village headman, Baba Siraj Din, in the village of Chiraghpur—an occasion that is used strategically by the novelist to gauge, the social and ideological impasses of the society, which form the background of the story. Therefore, the opening of the novel with the character of Baba Siraj Din inside his “large white washed bedroom” and Zari Bano’s presence by his side is indicative of three important things. Baba Siraj Din’s introduction as a ‘village headman’ announces to the reader that the story of the novel is anchored in a place where the male was the head of the village. In this novel, Zari Bano is presented as a married woman—‘their holy woman’, with a loving husband and a young son. Typhoon is in fact a sequel to Qaisra Shahraz’s debut novel ‘The Holy Woman’ which revolves round the forced marriage of Zari Bano, the grand daughter of Baba Siraj Din to the holy Quran. After the death of her only brother, Zari Bano was made the holy woman against her will in order to retain the control of the family’s property. Yet the novel ends, with her forced marriage with her brother-in-law after her sister had died, again to retain the property of her deceased sister. Baba's passionate plea to Zari Bano for her forgiveness signals his confession of the unjust control that he had on her life. It also reveals the way the patriarchal world of Chiraghpur demanded total obedience and conformity with tradition of women whose fates were in the hands of their male custodians. They had no control over their lives nor had any say even in the important decisions of their lives. Shahraz brings forth the divorce experience of her female protagonist within this patriarchal social setup, where man and woman were shown in contrasting terms—male being the ruler and female being suppressed.
Typhoon opens with a scene of a room in the village havelli, where Baba Siraj Din was on his deathbed. His family tended him with great love and respect; however, he was haunted by the memories of Naghmana’s first visit to his village as a stranger. Firstly, he remembered her as:

*The crimson lips curved into a smile, as she peeped up at him from behind the dark sunglasses-her long hair draping at her hips. A confident foot strapped in elegant black sandals had stepped out. The second one faltered, his stern mask of disapproval wiping away her smile. ‘Assalam Alaikum Baba Jee!’ She greeted him politely. She was a stranger in ‘his’ village and the one who did not attempt to cover her head in his presence. Siraj Din dismissed her salutation and pointedly ignoring her walked on. The woman remained standing next to her car, bewildered by his rudeness. He turned his henna-dyed head and rested his green gaze on her bare arms and the thick curtain of hair spread over her right shoulder. Tapping his ivory walking stick firmly on the ground, Siraj Din ruthlessly trod on.* (p. 3 emphasis in original)

This excerpt is taken from the first chapter of the novel. Baba Siraj Din is recounting his cold resentment for Naghmana the niece of a village woman, Fatima. As an account of the first meeting between the village ‘Buzurgh’ and the ‘stylish, professional city woman’, the excerpt has much in it of note beyond that meeting of the two strangers, which later had brought the ‘typhoon’, into the village as the narrator would recount later. Indeed, it is just this other content, which gives the representation of the divorce incident its value and character in the novel. First, it is indispensable to consider the circumstances and content of the scene. In his last moments, he was assailed by the memory of young Naghmana standing beside her car, with her smart sunglasses and long hair, which draped her shoulders and her confident greeting. This meeting called up the feeling of Baba Siraj Din’s cold, speculative curiosity for Naghmana twenty years ago, whose uncovered head and challenging apparel stirred a strong feeling of revulsion in the
heart of Baba Siraj Din. Naghmana’s dressing was not only awkward, but also objectionable. Baba’s imperious gaze directed at ‘her bare arms and the thick curtain of hair’ is significant as it is a clue to the reader that the putative arrogance of Naghmana for not having her head covered before the village head and the standard of loose morality it implied were not to be taken at face value. Shahraz’s thematic intentions in the passage are clear. The point was not that Naghmana did not cover her head, it was one of creating an atmosphere in the village whereby a male became the judge of a woman’s morality and modesty. Moreover, Naghmana’s vicarious experience of his disdain clearly outlined the power nexus. The angst which Baba felt as noted above was the consequence of not lowering her head in respect for the man who was “known for patting the heads of the village women in a traditional gesture of duty” (p. 156). In his role as the ‘village-moral guide’ and ‘decision-maker’, he felt threatened to have a ‘confident’ woman who was distinguishable from the typical, village women in his territory; there was an authority in her appearance and she looked capable of making personal decisions and choices as the vision reports with noticeable insertion of the woman ‘standing next to her car’. Baba Siraj Din’s hyphenated reference to Chiraghpur as ‘his’ village announces to the reader a place where Baba Siraj Din acclaimed to have an absolute authority of the feudal patriarch.

The recollection of the memory consolidated his position of power through a series of contemptuous gestures. In answer to her greeting, he responded with silent insolence. Without question, the most telling statement in the quoted passage was the sentence: ‘Siraj Din dismissed her salutation and pointedly ignoring her walked on’. As the essence of memory is a relationship of dominance and subordination, such realization cannot fail to carry impact. When in the morning of the following day, when Hajra approached him and complained about Naghmana’s illicit relationship with her son-in-law, his true intention behind arranging the village kacheri were quite obvious from his prejudiced thoughts, “You will wish, young madam, that you had never set eyes on the Buzurgh or this village of mine by the time I have finished with you!” he
thought savagely, trying to banish the attractive face and the bare head of the woman from his mind as he passed her car parked outside the Doodwali’s courtyard” (p. 113). Baba as a male-head of the village became the gazer (or more appropriately in Foucaults word’s the jailor) and Naghmana became an object (who was subject to be disciplined) which is suggested by Naghmana’s unconscious act of covering her head and polite greeting despite reading the disapproval in his eyes.

During her first visit, Naghmana became subject to the gaze of not only the village head, but also of village women, “she remembered them all. Young, old, teenage girls. Gauche village women, constantly staring at her, since she arrived. It was as she had virtually landed from another world”(Shahraz 2003, p. 42). Apparently, her long hair had attracted everyone’s attention from the moment she stepped out of the car, but the narrator states the reality in these words: “first the old man had grimaced at it, for there was no scarf wound round her head. Then teenage girls were giving her surreptitious looks of envy, whereas the elder ones had glanced at her bare head and open mane of hair with a distinct look of disapproval.” (Shahraz 2003, p. 42-430) Her appearance defied the idealized figure of the virtuous women of the village. Shahraz’s constant concern with a gaze suggests that the oppression of Naghamana was established through the mechanism of Panoptic arrangement of Chiraghpur. Shahraz’s representation is not about sight as such, but signifies that the body is the most important thing about a female and that a male’s perception of a female’s body is the basic reality in her life. For Shahraz the power of these ‘unequal gazes,’ became the condition of Naghmana’s ultimate surveillance by the village of Chiraghpur. Of course, her physical visibility had disturbed the status quo of the village’s cultural codes.

What immediately follows is a second memory of Baba Siraj Din, which brings the paradoxical image of Naghmana before the readers. Implicit in the following excerpt is the disciplining power of the patriarchal ideology over a woman:
With the tightly wound chadar around her shoulders and bowed head, she glanced up from beneath the edge of the shawl. Her eyes were those of the wounded dear. Beseecching and resigned. ‘I divorce you!’ The words dropped on the hushed silence. The awed leaves in the courtyard stopped rattling. The afternoon breeze stilled. The villagers held their breath. ‘I divorce you!’ ‘I divorce you!’ ‘I divorce you!’ Three deadly thalaks pelted down onto her bent body, forcing her head to fall on her chest. (p. 4 emphasis in original).

In this subjective description of Naghmana one is struck by the contrasting image of Naghmana’s appearance. Aside from the unexpected transition of Naghmana’s apparel from modern to traditional, the narration, particularly enlists two essential points: Naghmana’s body covered with a ‘chador’ and the pronouncement of triple divorce- an unethical practice, which is strongly despised in the law of Shariah. Much of the memory is based on the act of seeing with minimal speech The second memory was in connection with Baba’s guilt over the unfortunate village Kacheri, when in his capacity as a village head he forced the innocent couple to divorce. After the couple had declared the legitimacy of their relationship, the punishment he gave them was extremely unfair.

The incident of Gulshan spying around her husband in the mid of the night, her eyes met the sight of “Haroon’s face bent over the woman’s, his arms reaching around her, holding her close. The woman’s head was pressed intimately against his chest” (p.11), and the consequent trial in village kacheri constitutes the second section of the novel and contains twenty-eight chapters. It narrates the incident that happened in May 1982, in the village of Chiraghpur where, “nobody did anything like this in their world. Nobody dared! For no man lifted an eye at young women, let alone a married man committing adultery with a virtual stranger-no matter how attractive the woman happened to be. It just didn’t make sense” (p. 25). Aside from the violation of the boundaries of private and public, once again Shahraz’s narration confronts the issue of
gaze. The power of the village over Naghmana’s life is evident from the abusive language with which Haroon’s mother-in-law cursed her. Sharhaz’s detailed illustration of her language suggests that most of her anger was targeted at Naghmana—the woman instead of Haroon. Her character suggests the role women played in maintaining the hegemony of patriarchy.

Not only the major part of different characters’ memories are based on the village kacheri, but also the major portion of the plot vividly details the consequent kacheri, which was not only attended by the village head, his shagird’s but by the whole village. In its narration of the fateful kacheri, most of the narrative works with the idea of gaze and its power over Naghmana’s divorce. At the time of village trial, she bowed her head with humiliation and disgrace and could not even lift her eyes. She knew that thousands eyes were staring her. The second memory that Baba Siraj Din had of Naghmana now in the light of village kacheri fully suggests the power of the Panoptic gaze and the way it policed Naghmana’s behaviour. Unable to stand her humiliation, the very next morning she left the village. However, before leaving the village, Naghmana’s act of cutting her hair showed the limitation of her action. Though she could not speak, but she registered her resistance by cutting off her long silky hair.

The final section is divided into ten chapters. This section presents the tragic end of Naghmana on Wednesday, May 2002, the day she returned to the village Chiraghpur after twenty years of the fateful village kacheri. Part four begins with Naghmana’s prediction that the typhoon which once played havoc in her life was back. The second appearance that Naghmana made in the course of the novel is again as a successful married woman with a loving husband and two young sons. She received the mail from Baba Siraj Din. The mail is suggestive of the social control that signaled Naghmana to return to her past—to her divorcée status. She was reluctant and did not want to go back to the village, but her beloved professor made the decision to visit the dying man, and Naghmana despite her several protests, had to fulfil the dying man’s wish. Naghmana was conscious of the reality that going back to the village meant confronting her past,
and yet she had to succumb before her husband who didn’t see any harm in fulfilling a dying man’s wish. She resisted saying “I can’t go there. It is an evil place—an evil village. There are snakes there, Jahangir” (p. 254).

The atmosphere of Baba Siraj Din’s haveli, with the village’s ritual sorrowing for the deceased village head mirrors the mood of the village where Naghmana slowly moved towards her end. In Baba Siraj Din’s bedroom, Naimat Bibi and Kulsoom staring at the elegant Naghmana and her second husband, Haroon, recalled “It is actually her!.. the young fashionable city woman who had caused such a furore—a tofan—in their village twenty years ago. And left them all buried under it” (p. 271). Blind to the charged atmosphere in the room, and unaware of the tension mounting between the husband and the wife, while asking for her forgiveness “for what happened to you…we feel we were partly responsible for that kacheri” (p. 273), both of them disclosed the dark secret of her past. Thus, past with all its painful happenings, once more relegated Naghmana to the position of a subaltern, “Naghmana’s head lowered. She was caught between two women who knew too much of her past and her husband who knew very little—but was learning fast” (p. 273). Realizing this “Naghmana panicked. She slid back on her chair, finding herself pressed further and further into the soft hands of oblivion. No escape” (p. 273).

It was at this particular moment that she had to answer all the suspicions of her husband regarding her first marriage. Though innocent and guiltless, she still could not satisfy him, he taunted her that she was refusing to go there because of the memories of her first husband, “so you are afraid of your first husband’s memories. Are they still so powerful, Naghmana that you go into a panic” (p. 255). Naghmana afraid of the look’ in the eyes of her husband, tried to sound normal by saying “Of course, Professor Jee. You are right! We women sometimes act in such a silly fashion” (p. 255). Finding no way to escape, she agreed to go to the village with a feeling that “the Typhoon was back. And with a vengeance” (p. 255). Naghmana’s relationship with
Professor Jee, her loving husband, got tainted with her past “there was no tenderness in his voice. It sounded like a stranger addressing her”(p. 255). Thus, Naghmana’s village sojourn is eventually dealt as her return to her traumatic divorced status.

3.5 Ancient Promises (2000)

Jaishree Misra’s Ancient Promises is a semi-autobiographical novel. Commenting on the presentation of the divorce experience of her female protagonist- Janu, Misra explains in the ‘Author’s Note’ at the end of the novel:

I am not Janu, just no character is ever quite the one it is based on. It is true that I, too, lost my teenage sweetheart to an English university and an arranged marriage. We met again, after a ten-year period of silence, in circumstances not dissimilar to those described in the book, effectively ending my marriage. I do have a Riya, with a learning disability, and as dear to me as Riya is to her mother in the book. (Misra 2000, p. 307)

Misra has identified the character of Janu as a partial representation of herself, which she claims to be the representative of an average middle class Indian woman living in the traditional family system. The character of Janu occupies a central position in Misra’s fiction, which centres round the troubled family and marital relationships that created a situation which made divorce as an ultimate solution to all the conflicts she faced in her life. In Misra’s fiction, the focus is not so much on events or as on Janu’s feelings, observations and analysis of the situations which led her to divorce in a society where, according to Janu the undesirability of the ‘d-word’ make it a subject to be only “spoken of in whispers” (p. 276). Misra, with her placement of the female protagonist within the traditional family system, identifies family as the primary and most sacred unit of the society and works with the idea of divorce as socially undesirable. In Ancient Promises, even in the liberal society of England when Janu was being investigated for alleged
illegal stay over there by the Immigration Department, Misra explains divorce as “divorce, adultery, horrid nasty, whichever country you were in” (p. 290). Misra’s comparison of Janu’s divorce with adultery suggests the extreme disapproval of divorce for a woman. Apart from its placement with adultery, expressions such as horror, shame is associated with the description of divorce to reflect the negative connotations with which it is always accompanied. Both these words are similar semantically, but together their use emphasizes extreme undesirability and disapproval of divorce, especially when put into their context are instrumental in bringing about social perceptions surrounding the issue of divorce. The way this word is used, and understood within the text reflects cultural meanings tied to it.

_Ancient Promises_ falls into three sections, each further divided into several short chapters of unequal length. The first part runs into seven chapters, serving as introductory chapter and sets forth her childhood memories. The whole narrative of _Ancient promises_ is presented from the perspective of Janu, and the decisive events of her life—her love for Arjun, the wedding ‘Alliance’ with Maraar clan, marital conflicts and the birth of a mentally handicapped daughter, her desperate struggles to get an England scholarship and subsequent divorce—all are revealed gradually as Janu looked back and remembered her past “the day her marriage ended” (p. 1). Janu’s reminiscence of her past becomes an expression of Misra’s critique of the complex ways in which patriarchal system works to establish and maintain female inferiority with the consequence that divorce never becomes an empowering alternative to escape the patriarchal hegemony.

The first part runs into seven chapters, serving as introductory chapter and sets forth Janu’s childhood memories. Janu’s brief announcement of ‘my marriage ended today’ at the opening of the story, effectively hints at the events that are to come in the course of the narration. Travelling back by bus through the wet Kerala night along with her widowed mother and a little
handicapped daughter highlights the propinquity and trepidation of the Janu without the protection of a male in her life. Misra’s setting of the opening of the novel with the drabness of the night harmonizes with the mood of the novel. Alone these three female characters are presented as travelling back to Kerala, saddened by the catastrophic divorce of Janu. Though divorce freed Janu from the oppressive confinement of the Maraar world, however, rejecting the traditions of the society that propagated woman’s status by her relation to the father or the husband, Janu badly felt the pain of her marital breakup. Janu viewed her divorce in positive terms in the sense of the control she regained over her life; however, the negative effects of social estrangement which ‘women deprived of their men faced’ in her society:

You saw them everywhere, women deprived of their men, sad little shadows that had lost their bodies. Widows, divorcees and those who never had the good sense to attach themselves to a man. They occupied the fringes of life, respected only if they embraced their lot in life and gave in gracefully, spending their time in prayer and reminiscence or repentance, depending on the circumstances of their particular single unblessed-ness. A widow couldn’t give her own child away in marriage or even be the first to fondle a grandchild. Such joys were reserved for that happy band of sumangalis, or those by blessed-by-marriage. (p. 144)

Since, conscious of the social ethos which tied a woman’s happiness and respectability with her marital bliss, Janu could not dispel her mother’s grief over her ‘husbandless-status’. As Elizbeth Jackson (2011) comments that it is a great shame for a woman ‘given’ in marriage to return to her parents house. (p. 35) Janu’s shameful return to Alleppey also suggests her mobility in public space on the onset of her divorce. However, in the next paragraph narration immediately shifts towards Janu’s remembrance of her short stay in England, where she spent her ninety-eight days with Arjun. Misra’s abrupt juxtaposition of the memory of her days spent in England with the
painful years of her marriage in the Maraar family suggests that an Indian woman can reinstate control and agency in her life only when she escapes the dominance of patriarchal norms. In countering the interplay of power politics within Indian marriages, Misra suggests that Janu’s divorce was not her defence of the institution of marriage, but the consequence of domestic violence within marital relationships. Janu’s act of looking out of the bus window, the “wide brown arc of muddy water being thrown up by the wheels of the bus, soaking all the cars we were overtaking without regret or apology”(p. 2), is suggestive of the way ‘hegemony of the powerful’ worked in Indian society. Misra uses the imagery of rain to comment on the action of the novel. The ‘seemingly-unstoppable’ rain on the day of Janu’s divorce is appropriate to the subdued mood of the event. She was so much petrified by the heavy rain that she could not help wondering if “God had finally downed all his tools in sheer despair at the weight of errors and mistakes that He simply wasn’t able to control any more” (p. 3). Janu compared the lightning flashes and deafening claps of thunder as morbid and eerie cries emanating from heaven on her ‘mistakes’: “But I’m still not sure ….was the mistake mine or was it Yours… was it a mistake at all or part of some grand plan? That’s what I want to think it was. A grand plan, ancient and meaningful and free of blame”(p. 3).

Opening her narration with this traumatic experience of Janu’s journey back home as a divorced woman with a little handicapped daughter and an old widowed mother serves to justify Misra’s association of divorce with mobility in stark contrast to the portrayal of marriage as a token of stability for a woman. In the preceding chapters of the novel, Misra gives devoted attention to the elaborate wedding arrangements, happenings and memories of the years Janu spent with the Maraar clan to justify the confusion and pain that Janu experienced after her divorce. Janu got married at the age of eighteen, which was quite early for the young protagonist; her wedding day was also her birthday. Busy with the wedding ceremonies not only her parents forgot about her birthday, but Janu also forgot about the day, that carried a code of her re-birth as
her “life was re-fashioned while a bride took shape” (p. 71). Janu remembered, “she was glowing in deep-silk tiny magenta that was shot with tiny gold threads. She looked luminous and beautiful. The picture of a school-not-quite-college-going figure, clad in jeans, was receding even in my head” (p. 72). The jeans-clad birthday girl was artfully transformed in a bashful bride in such a way that even her own reflection in the mirror was a strange sight for Janu “I looked in the mirror this change of look signaled her transcendence to the social role of a wife” (p. 73).

Whole day she was under the constant gazing of watchful eyes. She didn’t want to get married at such an early age, but she had to succumb before the wish of her parents who controlled her life. Devoid of any pleasure or excitement, she heartlessly went through the different ceremonies of her wedding of her wedding without looking up. When she saw herself in the mirror, she identified the reflection of the bride with that of a prisoner, with her wedding dress like a tent, jewellery like chains and her posture subservient. The moment she left her parents’ house in a brand new ambassador car, she found herself suddenly squashed ‘as new husband and new mother-in-law got into the back seat on either side of her. Leaving behind her parents, now her husband and the mother-in-law were handed over the charge of her life. The presence of mother-in-law on her other side made her realize that she has married not just Suresh but his whole family, as Janu later in the novel says that “It was the Maraars I had married, not Suresh” (p. 87). Misra’s detailed description of Janu’s wedding exposes marriage as a form of commodification, as Jabir Jain (2003) comments: Marriage in (India) is viewed not as self-fulfilment, but as the fulfilment of a social and familial duty where the body is foregrounded as a commodity” (p. 74).

Misra’s narrative makes use of Janu’s childhood memories, to criticize the oppressive beliefs, mythical traditions, spaces of exclusion and religious taboos that structure the identity and experiences of a woman in India. Therefore, though the experience of divorce is a personal one; it cannot be separated from the overall ethos of the society. Of all the gendered ideologies, Misra
suggests sexuality of a woman as the most powerful one for the “reputations of the families were carried on the shoulders of their daughters, she said. And parents of boys did not have to worry about things like this” (p. 47). Jackson (2011) and Puri (1999) have also situated the honour of the family as centrally located in the behaviour of women since the “Izzat (family honour) seems to be a female-linked commodity. Its preservation is incumbent upon women’s behaviour alone” (p. 115). The issue of sexual harassment, in particular, is suggested to such an extent that Jyoti Puri (1999) says, “normative prescriptions of premarital chastity appear to be central to what counts as sexual respectability for … middle-class women. As Indian women, premarital non-chastity is unthinkable” (p. 115).

In a space encoded deeply by patriarchal norms, it was intolerable for Janu’s parents to allow their daughter to develop a pre-marital affair. Misra deals with this issue with typical candidness as she shows through the resentful remembrance of the strong reaction and disgust of her parents when they caught her meeting with Arjun outside school premises. Janu’s teen-age deviation from the social norms of the society altered her life forever. She lost the trust of her father, had to quit her studies, as “I was told from now until my final exams I would be taken to and picked up from school. I would not be allowed to use telephone and would be accompanied everywhere. There was to be no more drama practice and no more maths tuition. No more roaming around town with the boys” (p. 49). She remembered her father’s strong reaction:

I hadn’t noticed the cane that my father had in his right hand. Ma said later, tearfully rubbing Burnol on my legs, that he’d gone into the garden and hacked it off the hedge himself...I heard a swishing sound, and seconds later realized he was slashing at my legs. Once, twice… I could hear my mother screaming at him to stop...Great red welts appeared on my legs, and on my heart, the next morning, testament to my shame and deception. (Divakaruni 2000, p. 48-49)
Jackson (2011) has studied the belief of sexual respectability which, when centred round women, becomes “an instrument of social control over their gendered bodies and sexualities” (p. 77). According to Puri (1999), Indian ideology “does not indicate active, desiring female sexualities, but views young girls and women as the objects or victims of male sexuality” (p. 78). The resentment of Janu’s father over her teenage love is thus presented as severe, rational, logical, and eventually culminating in physical violence against her. The way Janu was punished by her father was quite logical in the context of the Indian society, which persistently accentuates the control of women’s sexuality as fundamental to patriarchal control.

In part two of the novel, Misra’s narration focuses on Janu’s internalization of the cultural norms regarding the importance of a woman’s marital status, detailing the overt instances in which Janu tried to preserve her marriage which implies marital stability as the sole responsibility of a woman. Despite Janu’s steadfast devotion, Suresh’s unscrupulous attitude towards his new wife is summed up caustically by Misra as: “Caught between a father who was in essence also his boss, a sharp tongue mother, a demanding younger sister, a young wife full of complaints and a baby who did not do all the charming things other babies did, he found that life outside the family home was starting to seem increasingly attractive” (p. 134). The character of Suresh is presented as a rich, tactless, materialistic, and grotesquely insensitive person. Suresh was not as such a caricature of a domineering husband, but he is shown to be insanely covetous and emotionally under the control of her mother’s dictates. Therefore, his interest in Janu was limited, to his sexual needs, expected that she should be automatically compliant, talked to her occasionally, and even seldom spent time with her. The essentially problematic nature of the relationship, however, is suggested by Janu’s description of her unhappiness in marriage as “now if I were being beaten up day in and day out, that would raise a few eyebrows, I thought. But tiny insults, so small and so subtle as to be almost invisible, couldn’t do any grave damage; just rob me gradually of my knowledge of myself” (p. 110). Janu’s painful reminiscence of her life as a
married woman in the Marrar house summarizes the plight of the good Hindu wife whose life is essentially a sacrifice. The extreme incompatibility of temperaments is aggravated by Janu’s long stay at her parent’s house before and after the birth of her daughter. As sensitive as she was, Suresh’s indifference at the birth of a daughter made her sad, yet she was then quite hopeful that “Suresh reached Delhi two days later, carrying gold jewellery meant for a baby boy sent by his parents… They’d hoped for a boy too obviously, but I was sure they would love Riya when they saw her, like I had done” (p. 117). Misra highlights the idea of wife as a commodity, through the traumatic memory of outright abuse that Janu suffered in her marriage: “I had subsumed my Delhi self to fit in, hoping to be loved…but had weighed down on Amma’s list of people deserving warmth and affection. And what her son had done to deserve this? Again not very much. It was more a case of what he’d not done” (p. 242).

Misra has also touched the issue of dowry tradition, which amounted to Janu’s troubles in the house of marriage. Srimati Basu’s (2012) classifies of the fundamental question of what the dowry is compensated for:

A display of the givers’ wealth that brings them social status? An acknowledgement of the receivers’ status and the payment required to become their kin? Compensation for the labour value of a person from the family, which can now benefit from their labour? Incentive to the family taking on an economically unproductive liability? Appreciation for a groom’s current market value? One or more of these criteria come into play, depending on individual and group resources, monetization and other forms of status. (p.vii–viii)

Particularly, she argues that in some situations “the hierarchy created between groups can become the conduit for extortionate demands, and the material and ideological dependence and subservience for women enshrined in the ideology of kanyadan (the gift of the virgin daughter)
exacerbates their vulnerability as well” (Basu 2012, p. xiv). This system continues to prevail in Indian society, where the ideology of wife as a possession operate alongside older ideologies of wifely subservience and self-sacrifice, and the resulting tensions result in the inferior status of a wife. On her reception, when she returned with a small sandal wood jewellery box from the bank locker, she could anticipate the displeasure of both Suresh’s mother and sister for receiving very few jewellery items from her parents as a part of her dowry. Every woman in the house gathered around her to decide what pieces she should wear at the reception which was clearly an exercise in ‘let’s see what these Highest Placed Delhi Officials give their daughters’. Her mother-in-law did not miss the chance to humiliate her by saying: “Oh look, Sathi have you ever seen such tiny ear-rings? They’re like you jumikies, only ten times smaller’. Well, they’ll match the sari she’ll be wearing, but we can’t have such tiny ones. What will people think!” (p. 91) Elizabeth Jackson (2011) sees the problem of dowry positions daughters as financial burdens– and sons as financial assets – to their natal families. She argues, “the system of dowry demeans female and is one of the expressions of the inferior status of women in Indian society” (p. 175). Madhu Kishwar’s (1999) view on dowry has a slightly different emphasis. She argues that dowry is a transfer of wealth from the men of one family to those of another with the bride acting as a vehicle of transfer.

After becoming a passive wife and an obedient daughter-in-law, Janu elaborated the way she fulfilled all the traditional roles demanded her, especially by turning towards pregnancy to make her marriage work. Misra voices Janu’s thoughts in the tone of a character who internalized the patriarchal mindset. Reflected in Janu’s account is a cultural notion that motherhood is indispensable for a woman to hold her marriage:

That’s what I’d do, I’d have a child! She as their grandchild would be loved. Especially, if she turned out to be the much-longed–for-first grandson. And, as his mother, I’d
receive a sort of instant double promotion, so to speak. Be elevated to the position of Good Mother and Good Daughter-in-law. And spin out my rest of the day basking in a kind of reflected glory and blissful, motherhood. (p. 49)

Her attitude reflects the overbearing patriarchal ideology, within which a woman's secures place and respect for producing sons. Furthermore, a woman may be replaceable in her position as wife and daughter-in-law but not as a mother. Kakar (1989) concludes the significance of a woman's maternal as “regardless of a woman’s caste, class, or regional background, and whether she is a young bride or an older woman who has experienced repeated pregnancies and childbirths, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else can” (p. 155). Motherhood was the option with which Janu attempted to secure her position as wife and daughter-in-law. However, Janu’s hopes remained unfulfilled when, “as it happened, Latha, the older daughter-in-law, beat me to it. The following summer she gave birth to a gorgeous baby boy, “receiving the certificate and double-promotion that I’d hoped for” (Misra 2000, p. 113). She was unlucky to not only bear a daughter, but also a daughter who was mentally handicapped. Riya’s birth finally sealed off her chances of happiness in her marital home.

Part three of the novel deals with the period of Janu’s life where though aware of society’s reactions, Janu emerged as an independent woman who defied the tradition of submission to the house of marriage and walked out of her unhappy marriage. In this part of the narration, Misra has shown the problems that a woman faces while approaching the legal system for assistance in marriage matters. He is the character, who becomes representative of the system rather than an individual. When Suresh refused to divorce, Janu went to Medhava Menon—the lawyer distantly related to Janu’s parents. In the beginning, he warmly welcomed both Janu and her mother in his office, and then started boasting of his connections with the wealthy and influential Maraar clan: “I attended your wedding, and you know had invites from both sides… I saw your husband just the other day at a Rotary Club Conference in Cochin. He was with G. K.
Cherian... So, you are Suresh Maraar’s wife, eh?” (p. 246) His stress on ‘Suresh Maraar’s wife’ implies the traditional mentality of the society where Janu stood worthy of respect as a married woman especially being the wife of an influential husband. However, there came an ironic twist in the situation when he was disclosed with Janu’s decision to divorce the ‘fine fellow’.

As Janu’s mother tried to explain some of the troubles of her daughter’s married life, he dismissed her requests of legal assistance believing in divorce as belonging to the ‘better-to-be-avoided-category’ for a young girl. Discouraging Janu of her decision, he said conspiratorially, “Moley, why all this divorce and all, eh? You go home and think about it. Such a serious step to take. After all, these are small problems that can be talked over and sorted out?” (Misra 2000, p. 249) Das (1999) confirms Misra’s presentation by stating that women can inherit, have the right to disagree to marry, when the marriage is arranged by the parents, can seek divorce and be divorced, yet there are restrictive mores to which among certain sections women have to submit. She further says, “during her childhood a woman depends on her father, during her youth to her husband, her husband being dead, on her sons, if she has no sons, on the near relatives of her husband, or in the default of them, on those of her father, if she has no paternal relations. The woman must address her husband as lord and master”(Das 1999, p. 50-51).

3.6 Sister of My Heart (1999)

_Sister of My Heart_ is a story of the two cousins-Anju and Sudha from the time they were eight years old to the age that Sudha experienced her marital failure. The plot of the novel fundamentally follows the narrative format popular in the 1770s (like the novels written by Elizabeth Inchbald and Maria Edgeworth) and is woven round the experiences of the two cousins who were born on the same day. Divakaruni for the most part has worked with their actions, their justifications for them, their trials and tribulations, and their efforts to overcome their oppression. The story of the novel is divided into two sections. The titles given to these parts _The Princess in_
the Palace of Snakes and The Queen of Swords imply the mythological misuse of the ideals of feminity and their impact on the life of an Indian woman. The chapters of the two sections are divided between these two characters: Anju who was headstrong and sceptical towards conservative orthodoxy of the society and Sudha who cautiously embraced paternalistic codes of the social setup. The chapters alternatively bear the names of the two protagonists and can be identified as the voices of the title that recount their beliefs, problems and memories. The story shifts between these two protagonists of contrasting personalities, which offer an access to the weaknesses and strengths of the complex traditions that affected their consciousness and conduct in life. They developed strong emotional attachments for each other while living in the old family house in Calcutta, yet their personalities were exactly poles apart. Divakaruni chose the title of the novel after Sudha, as Anju claimed her to be “the sister of my heart” (p. 24).

Divakaruni’s plot is primarily of resistance, since she resists against the idea of Indian cultural tradition that makes wifehood and motherhood as women’s essential identities. Thus, in the world of Divakaruni, sisterhood becomes a powerful metaphor of change. Everybody criticized the strong affection, which glued their lives in a way that was not socially desirable. Even their mothers made several attempts to separate them but remained unsuccessful. This was the fact that Sudha realized quite early in her life as, “but I finally figured it out. What people hate is how happy Sudha and I are when we’re together. How we don’t need anyone else”(p. 25). The plot of the novel, which resembles traditional stories of female suffering and pain, but differs markedly from them in the sense that sisterhood provides the two protagonists with a strong sense of belonging in a male dominated society. By sharing their crises, anxieties, resentments, pleasures, hopes and fantasies with one another, the two sisters come to acknowledge that ….its not us who are maladjusted, but a society that imposes impossible restrictions on use. Such a collective vision bestows confidence and strength (and rage) where timidity and weakness existed before.
Of the many ways Indian society perpetuates gender ideologies, myths and story telling most pervasively endorse stereotypical perceptions and gender roles. Divakaruni has used the motif of story telling to question the ideological biases of gender hierarchy that discourages women to resist their oppression. The two girls spent most of their early years of life with Pishi Ma than they did with their mothers. Pishi was a traditional woman who wanted the girls (born after the deaths of their fathers) to follow the feminine rule of the society; which was to marry, run a house, and raise children. The stories she told them – an important source of a female’s traditional learning- were replete with gender roles and reinforced those values. Most of her plots centered on some form of male adventure and females figured chiefly in their traditional service, function or in more imaginative but ultimately no less restrictive roles of fairy, fairy godmother and underwater maiden. The strategies for female survival in her stories were clear: housework, looking after children, marriage, deference to the superior power, and general value of men. The paramount importance of storytelling in Divakaruni’s narrative is evident from the very title of the two sections of the sections. *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes* is named after the story of a princess who lived in an ‘underwater palace’. It was the story which, Pishi Ma used to tell the two cousins and which Sudha retold Anju in the course of story. The princess who:

Spent her girlhood in a crumbling marble palace set around with guards. They told her what was proper and what was not, and held up her poison spears before her face if she attempted to stray outside the boundaries they had drawn for her. When she was old enough she married, obediently, the king they had selected for her. The fireworks at the wedding were so loud that no one hears if her heart was breaking. And when she got to her husband’s house, she had no trouble adjusting, for it was exactly the same as the house, she had grown up in, except that the guards were fiercer and their spear tips more poisonous. (p. 309)
Pishi’s’ stories carried the mythical representation of social reality where a woman could only find happiness in marriage and motherhood. The pinnacle of achievement for a girl was motherhood. However, Pishi’s stories had a certain demerit. The women of Pishi’s stories were always passive and it was mostly sexually submissive behaviour of women that ensured their happiness: Anju did not, however, simply parrot those ideologies of femininity, which Pishi’s stories developed for Sudha. Anju never believed in myths, demons and falling stars, whereas Sudha’s life was “caught in the enchanted web of the stories she loved so much and told so well” (p.115). The stories which Pishi Ma used to tell Sudha in her childhood left a strong impression on her psyche. Given the romanticized content of femininity in Pishi’s stories, Sudha was drawn into the world of passivity. The initial signs of Sudha’s meekness were visible in the games, which she used to play with Anju in childhood. As a beautiful child, Sudha acted out as a captured princess to be rescued by a warrior prince. The prescription to be passive was internalized by Sudha to the extent that she became object of other people’s experiences rather than the subject of her own. The passive victim lacks the voice of her own – inarticulateness is the mark of an oppressed group.

Sudha lived her life in the shadow of Pishi’s stories; it was only the threat to her daughter’s life that turned her benign femininity into malignant aggression:

All went well with the marriage until the queen was due to give birth. Then the soothsayer discovered that the baby was a girl. Aghast at the idea that their future ruler might be a woman, the guards aimed their poison spears at the queen’s belly so they could destroy the baby before she was born. The king petrified could do nothing to protect her. The queen was terrified too, but she placed her hands on her belly to gather her courage from her unborn daughter. And she felt something being passed into her hands through the wall of the womb. Looking down, she saw it was a sword, a flaming
sword made of light, and then other for each hand. Whirling the swords around her head like the *Goddess Durga*, like the *Rani of Jhansi*, the queen left the palace, and none dared prevent her. (p. 30)

Sudha’s aggression over the denial of justice turned her into a powerful woman is a focus for man’s unease. By telling her daughter the story of Queen of Swords, Sudha seems to explain it to the readers that as a princess she was expected to be a submissive wife, but after experiencing humiliation and victimization with the birth of her daughter, she distanced herself from those traditions that keep women passive and meek. Instead of remarrying, she chose instead Anju’s offer of reprieve with a hope of “starting anew, my daughter and I, and because there were no roles charted out for us by society, we could become anything we want” (p. 279). Yet, if women are to protest against accepted stereotypes of femininity, they have to appear to turn themselves into shrews and witches: this is why the second section of the novel is titled as *Queen of Swords*.

Pishi’s character holds significance in the novel not only as the teller of the myths to the young girls but also in another way. It was through Pishi that the Sudha at the age of thirteen has to know the family secret. Sudha’s persistent interest to know the past was stimulated by her mother’s perpetual anguish towards her, who in the words of Anju “has a tamarind-and-chilli tongue and isn’t shy about using it on my cousin” (p. 59). Deprived of her mother’s love, Sudha desired to know the reason that had caused her mother to give up her maternal tenderness: “perhaps it will help me to understand why her heart is so bile-bitter, why she has only words of complaint and chastisement for me. Perhaps it will help me to grow more daughterly towards her” (p. 32). On one catastrophic day of her childhood day when Anju was busy reading an English novel, Sudha went after Pishi who was busy pickling mangoes on the terrace to know the secret, which she often promised to tell the girls when they would be grown up. However, Sudha’s strong insistence forced Pishi to tell her the past happenings, which took away Sudha’s
‘childhood’. In telling Sudha, Pishi disclosed that her father was neither cousin nor a distant relative. It was Anju’s parents’ benevolence that her parents were offered a place in the house of Chaterjees. The most shocking of all was the knowledge that her mother, who guarded “every propriety as though it is a fragile crystal heirloom she has been personally entrusted with”(p.36), was merely the daughter of poor peasants. Bijoy saw her first when she was washing her soiled clothes by the river side. Nailini’s breath taking beauty had captivated him instantly as promised her riches, honour and marriage into one of Calcutta’s oldest families. Her disgust over “the unending drudgery of her chores- scouring pots …lighting coal fires…plastering cow dung on the walls of the hut that leaked every monsoon” (p. 36)- had led her to elope. Pishi’s pessimistic account of the family history threw Sudha into daunting emotional crisis. Sudha suffering from exhaustion found herself isolated from the Chaterjee family, “I Sudha, am nothing to Anju. Not twin, not sister, not cousin. Not anyone except the daughter of the man who, with his foolish dreams, led her father to his death”(p. 53).

Sister of My Heart is a story about the limits and boundaries that surround the lives of single mothers in India. Divakaruni’s narration is rich in the presentation of diverse maternal figures, which offers a vision to the gaps that exists between the practical experience and the ideological expectations of motherhood. Through the maternal experiences of different characters in the novel, the novelist has worked with the idea that ideologically a female’s childbearing and rearing capacities are used to define and sequester them. In reacting against the traditional mythology of motherhood in Indian society, Divakaruni draws attention to the context, including geo-historical position, age, social class, financial standing, religion, and familial arrangements, which influences both the woman as an individual person and her relationship with her children. Sudha’s tragedy is structured by relationships with various maternal characters of the novel and her personal experience of mothering: maternal anxiety concerning the daughters, the forces that shape mother-daughter relationship, the horrid material and bodily aspects of marriage,
miscarriage, abortion and the difficult decisions confronting the pregnant mothers. While Divakaruni has represented different aspects of mothering in the novel, the portrayal of Sudha’s mother-in-law points out arguably that motherhood empowers mothers who give birth to sons like Sunil’s mother. In its characterization of the three mothers, *Sister of My Heart* challenges the myth of motherhood as all-fulfilling for women. Divakaruni has contrasted the romanticized idea of ‘motherhood’ carried in Pishi’s stories with the life of the three mothers in the text. Sudha was always greatly touched by the efforts of Gouri Ma (Anju’s mother) who worked hard at the bookstore to keep the family afloat after the death of their husbands:

That’s when she started going to store everyday –the pawned lands were forfeit already – and when people, even her own relatives said that it was a scandal, no Chaterjee wife had ever done such a thing, she looked at them with hard eyes and told them she would do whatever was necessary to ensure her daughter’s future. (p. 48)

The pressure of managing and controlling the finances and to keep the traditions of the family turned her into a heart patient. The doctors suggested her a heart surgery, which she refused to undergo till the daughters’ were married and settled within their in-laws. She knew that the news of her illness would create hurdles in getting good proposals for Sudha and Anju. Her refusal was based on the typical social expectation that “wives must be good breeding stock, and people don’t want to have anything to do with hereditary diseases” (p. 114). Later, despite the strong protests of the whole family, she sold the family bookstore that was their only source of income in order arrange magnificent trousseaus for the girls. All those sacrifices which Gauri Ma had been making for the prosperous future of the two cousins were never lost on Sudha. While, she idealized Gouri Ma and wanted “to be noble and brave just like her” (p. 17), however, her relationship with her own mother (Aunt Nailini) was marked with aggression and tension. Aunt Nailini’s constant taunts and senselessness for the people of the house had created emotional
fissures in their mother-daughter relationship. Throughout, the novel Aunt Nalini remained hostile towards her daughter’s choices, desires and preferences in life. Divakaruni has coded the cause of her verbal aggression in these words: “Her life must have seemed like a trick of moonlight. One moment her arms were filled with silvery promises. The next she was widowed and penniless…except for a daughter…words were all she had to save herself and her child” (p. 86). Undoubtedly, her bitter nature had to do with the sudden and tragic turns of her fate and the consciousness of being ‘other’ to the family. The character of Aunt Nalini stands in stark contrast to that of Pishi Ma. If motherhood had appeared a burden to Aunti Nalini, for poor Pishi Ma it was the other way round. Pishi Ma got widowed in the first year of her marriage. Afterwards, her life had remained one of struggle, compromise and pain. Childlessness in Pishi’s life had brought only suffering and pain. Divakaruni has constructed Pishi’s character round a typical image of an Indian widow of the upper class who wore white dresses, no jewellery with tonsured head and live the life of total dependency. Pishi experienced, in her own words, remorse and shame and then said:

When I came back to my parent’s home as a widow, how many of society’s tyrannical rules I followed! How old was I then, Gouri ? No more than eighteen. I packed away my good saris, my wedding jewellery, ate only one meal a day, no fish or meat, fasted and prayed – for what? Every night I soaked my pillow with guilty tears because I was told it was my bad luck, which had caused my husband’s death. (p. 269)

All her life Pishi had paid for the sin which she had not committed. However, Pishi was not alone to suffer this fate. The significance of these maternal figures in the novel is to suggest a cultural context that is antagonistic and unsympathetic towards husbandless women. Their troubles bespeak not of the failure of motherhood; rather they signify a narrative strategy, one that seeks to stress the importance of male in the life of a woman by showing the loss and suffering that
mothers suffered in the absence of their husbands.

Most of the male figures in Divakaruni’s narrative take on a symbolic form, they are portrayed as status providers, money makers and upholders of ancestral gentility. Living under the all-pervasive patriarchal social circumstances, hardly any autonomous male character exists in the novel that was immune from the pressure of social norms. It is through the creation of male characters like Bijoy, Gopal and Ramesh, Divakaruni makes the case that under patriarchal systems, both male and female are equally compliant and subservient. Anju’s dead father-Bijoy was remembered by the family as “always proper, always responsible” and “the only son of Chaterjees trapped since birth in the cage of propriety” (p. 46). Anju and Sudha were born after the death of their fathers and only seen them in the family photographs. While Gouri remained busy in handling the family fortunes and Aunt Nailini with her ‘boasting about her ancestors’, the girls used to learn about their family secrets through Pishi Ma. It was Pishi who told the girls that although he found satisfaction and pleasure in spending time with his family, as the only surviving heir of the Chaterjee family his life was full of great challenges. It was only after the arrival of Gopal (Sudha’s father) in his life that some of “his seriousness fell away, that he laughed more boyishly than in years” (p. 35). Since, the family fortunes were in decline, Bijoy was tempted by Gopal’s allures to find the hidden treasure. Although, Gouri Ma and Pishi were totally against the whole idea, nevertheless he embarked on the dangerous journey of ruby-hunt and lost his life at a young age. At this point in the narrative, Divakaruni explicitly discards the perception that only men exercise pressure over women to get them to conform to patriarchal norms. In other words, they too are subject to the symbolic violence. Instead, the male characters of the novel also accepted the cultural norms at an unconscious level. It is essentially noticeable in the case of Sudha’s love for Ashok: “Ghosh. The word toll inside my head like a warning bell. I can hear my mother saying, in her most disproving patrician tones, What? A lower caste mean?” (p. 76) At her first meeting with Ashok, Sudha was alarmed by his low caste identity. Despite of
his settled family background and deep love for Sudha, his ‘Gosh’ identity turned him into docile subject, who was unable to resist the violent force of Aunt Nalini’s refusal. By bringing in the issue of class and caste, Divakaruni points out that not only patriarchy, but also the class, caste, and lineage hierarchies of the Indian society had added complications in Sudha’s life.

Men, in *Sister of My Heart* were not the evil perpetrators of tradition. When Sunil’s parents sent the wedding proposal for Anju, he made an ardent attempt to break the false traditions of bride viewing. He himself went to the family bookstore to meet Anju with an apology: “Forgive me for the deception –I had to see you myself, you as you really are, not at some unnatural bride viewing ceremony, swathed in silks and jewels, sitting silently with your head lowered” (p. 137). Even after marriage, Sunil proved to be a considerate husband. On the day Sunil’s father fiercely fought with him, Anju told Sudha “Sunil has brought me *luchis* and *alu dum*, all the way from the railway station because the neighborhood stores were close by the time he and his father finished with each other” (p. 185). Unlike the traditional Indian husbands, he gave Anju the permission to go back to her parents’ house and stay there till she received her visa. Sunil proved to be liberal husband for Anju as “he taught me to drive and introduced me to his colleagues at work. He bought me jeans and hiking boots ….short hair …taken me to the malls, plays dance club and oceans ….my going to college to get me the degree” (p. 208). Even the character of Ramesh was quite distinguishable in its social figurations of an Indian husband. On their wedding night, Sudha’s request for the delay of conjugal activity did not touch his masculinity as he replied, “I understand completely. I do not believe in forcing such things. I would be happy to give you-us- time to get to know each other” (p. 177). However, Ramesh’s extreme powerlessness in the hands of his mother suggests that men also suffer under patriarchy. His tyrant mother directed even his married life. The observance of his distress can be made in Sudha’s account when she told Anju “Last night he promised me he’d go and see the doctor and do whatever is necessary, and already this morning he has set up an appointment with him. But
we are not going to tell our mother-in-law” (p. 224). The fact that he was an educated man and endured the responsibilities of breadwinning could not free him from the constraints gendered norms. Despite his passionate love for Sudha, he could do nothing to save their relationship. Not only he was subject to his mothers dictates, for Sudha, he was an equal victim. So, after divorce Sudha could imagine how his mother would have pressurized him to remarry: “What about your duty to the Sanayal family, what about me, I’m too old to run this household all by myself—until one day he covered his ears and said, OK, OK, do what you want.” (p. 326). In Divakaruni’s world, men neither benefitted from patriarchy nor played a part in influencing women to submit to it.

Towards the end of Sister of My Heart, a progressive development of feminist consciousness is noted among women of Chaterjee family in their propensity to allow Sudha to resist oppression rather than to passively accept it. Female oppression, in Divakaruni’s narrative, is not meant to refer to the subjugation of or by men. Rather, it rests on a series of issues ranging from wide social commensalities, economic dependence, social pressures congealed into structural necessities or dispersed as moral systems, the pull of effective relationships and the perceived legitimacy of marriage to protect women from the patriarchal violence of other individuals or groups. Men, though they are the dominant actors in masculine domination, are nonetheless dominated by it, in the sense that they too must endure its restrictions. This would seem to imply that the enemy is ‘tradition’ rather than individual males. While Divakaruni has regarded ‘tradition’ as the most alarming barrier to female autonomy, her traditional and the most passive protagonist liberated herself from patriarchal oppression with her decision to leave her husband and later in her acceptance of Anju’s offer.
3.7 Conclusion

While all the chosen five novelists have used realist mode of narration to criticize the conventional social ethos of divorce in the postcolonial society, their use of narrative strategies defies easy generalizations. Overall, the narrative techniques of the chosen postcolonial women novelists seem to resist any easy generalizations about connections between feminist consciousness and literary form as such. In particular, they decentre the male experience of divorcé, their emphasis remains mainly on the memories, feelings and problems of their female characters who experience divorcé, together with the use of extensive cultural myths, images and symbols. In particular, Roy’s narration is somewhat more complex than Misra and Divakaruni’s. It includes multiple perspectives about the different forms of subalternity which a divorced female protagonist faces, all of which she illustrates to be interrelated. In contrast to Roy’s elaborate survey of the political, historical and social world, Misra and Divakaruni have focused more on individual subjective experience of their female divorcees within domestic circumstances in order to establish that in traditional Indian society the subalternity of a divorced woman originates and is perpetuated by domestic space. Like their Indian contemporaries, both Tehmina Durrani and Qaisra Shahraz have also tended to adhere to a ‘realist’ narrative mode within the fiction selected for the study. Shahraz has presented contrasting characters to explore the reactions and experiences of the unfortunate divorce incident that forms the central tragedy of the novel. Like Roy’s narration, Tehmina Durrani too surveys the broader political and cultural contexts of a Pakistani society, which creates the impression of authenticity and objectivity in her presentation of the divorce issue in contemporary social environments. However, an analysis of the Indian/Pakistani context as presented in these texts also points out the hierarchies of female powers within the patriarchal social order, which contribute to the oppression of divorced women.
CHAPTER 4

SPACE OF REPRESENTATION: DIVORCE IN THE HOUSE OF FICTION

4.1 Introduction

The house is perceived as central to the structural organization of society in the fiction written by Indian/Pakistani female novelists. In the novels under consideration, a house presents an image of a multi-layered space that establishes particular ideologies of femininity and the principal space occupied by the female protagonists. While, the physical structures of the houses ascertain the stability of the family institution, the domestic space is perceived as a metaphor of control and a carrier of patriarchal ideologies and gender hierarchies. The devoted attention given to the presentation of the house both as a character and as a symbol by the selected novelists is responsive to their concerns over the relationships between space, experience and identity formation. These novels feature a general lack of choice over the space women occupy and confront. The lives of postcolonial women are in multiple ways controlled by the insidious gendered boundaries which, as a consequence conceive stepping out of the house of marriage as an act of rebellion. The focus of this chapter is on the image of the house and domestic space as definitive points of orientation in the presentation of divorce as a gendered category and their role in constituting the marginality of the divorced women.

4.2 The God of Small Things (1997)

*Returned.* As though that was what twins were meant for. To be borrowed and returned. Like library books. (p. 156)
The God of Small Things opens with the return of Estha and Rahel after twenty years to their grand maternal house in Ayemenem. The spatial components of the novel highlight the role space plays in developing the subalternity of Ammu and her twin children. In Roy’s narrative, architecture is as dominant a subject as marriage and divorce, and they all are intricately related, since she demonstrates how interdependent marriage and domestic space are. Roy herself admits that, “studying architecture taught me to apply my understanding of the structure, of design and of minute observation of detail to things other than buildings. To novels, to screenplays, to essays. It was an invaluable training” (Tickell 2007, p. 44). In The God of Small Things domestic space reinforces the roles each family character is consigned to play, establishing the power hierarchy. Roy presents domestic space in her narrative as determining the gender hierarchy of the Ayemenem household: male authority and control is ensured by the house itself. The image of “History House” with its ‘cool stone floors and dim walls and billowing ship-shaped shadows” (Roy 1997, p. 53) creates the social and cultural circumstances specific to a given time and place within the narrative.

In the opening page of the novel, Roy discusses the grand old ‘Ayemenem House’ in detail. She introduces the house almost like a character. Since their father moved to west along with his second wife, Estha had no choice but to come back to Ayemenem. Roy uses domestic space and the way it prescribed the continuation of the social rules and conventions. Roy’s complex doubled time scheme allows for a meditative, almost obsessive remembrance of these family tragedies, and it is through the close juxtaposition of past and present that Roy is able to develop the novel’s central concern; the detrimental effects of their mother’s marital breakup on Estha and Rahel, their traumatized return to the ancestral house and reconciliation in adulthood. Whereas after her marital breakup, Rahel had come to meet her brother, Estha. Roy’s arrangement of the gabled roof, moss streaked walls with locked doors and windows suggests the importance of the house in the life of a woman, no matter how much detached and aloof the house may appear to her: “it was
a grand old house, the Ayemenem House, but aloof-looking. As, though it had little to do with the people who lived in it. Like an old man with rheumy eyes watching children play, seeing only transience in their shrill elation and their wholehearted commitment to life” (p. 2).

Roy describes the house as almost a living character that had grown old with the passage of time. Even though the house which Rahel had returned to was run down, the minute details of the house with the expensive furniture, Mammachi’s violin and violin stand, the Ooty cupboards, the plastic basket chairs, the Delhi beds, the dressing table fro Vienna with ivory knobs and rosewood dining table announced the prosperous social standing of the Ayemenem family. What is particularly noticeable about the house is the presence of Baby Kochamma, twin’s grand maternal aunt. She was eighty-three years old when the twins returned. As the narration progresses, the logic of Baby Kochamma’s survival in the house is revealed. As a young girl, she loved an Irish priest. Since, he belonged to different denominations of the church; Baby Kochamma kept the family honour and graciously accepted for her “the fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma” (p. 45). Indeed, Baby Kochamma’s acceptance of lifelong celibacy is representative of the conventional values of the Ayemenem family where a woman can only secure her place in the house by compromising her personal happiness in the service of the family’s reputation. Ammu, by contrast, had defiled the honour of the house by marrying a Bengali Hindu. Therefore, most troubling of all to Ammu was the disagreement and extreme intolerance exhibited by Baby Kochamma, who not only had strong resentment for Ammu but also hated the twins. The clearest example of her dislike was evident from her fanaticism to make them realize that “they lived on sufferance in the Ayemenen house, their maternal grandmother’s house where they really had no right to be” (p. 45).

In her narration, Roy combines both the architectural and ideological dynamics of the space to establish the gender, class and power hierarchy of the Ayemenem home. The dynamics of family relationships were played out not just in the house, but with and through it. The study
was the private space mostly used by Pappachi as a space to discipline Mammchi in order to ensure unquestioning obedience. Nevertheless the day, Chacko had crossed his territory and stopped him from beating Mammachi with a warning of dire consequences altered the power politics of the house. That particular incident was not only an announcement of the end of Pappachi’s rule and Chacko’s status as a substitute head of the house, but also altered the course of Mammachi’s loyalties from her husband to the son. Of course, she understood the significance of Chacko’s action and recognized him as an individual with ultimate spatial authority.

Ammu’s decision to marry a Hindu was carried in her desire to escape the suffocating atmosphere of the Ayemenem house. Even in her pre-married life, the grand Ayemenem house never really accommodated Ammu. She remembered her childhood as a deadly struggle in which she tried to survive Pappachi’s agonizing bouts of anger, which were routinely accompanied by countless beatings. Although Pappachi had always been short-tempered, he suffered intense disenchantment “when his moth was named after the Acting Director of the Department of Entomology, a junior officer whom Pappachi always disliked” (p. 49). Pappachi, a retired Imperial Entomologist, in his frustration over the failure to have the biggest moth named after him (which he accidently had discovered) always emitted his rage over his wife and children. Ammu spent her life before marriage in a house where Pappachi ruled like a tyrant. He did not allow her to study at college, since he believed that girls had to marry off and leave their parents house anyway. The reason behind this belief in the words of Awan was that “the boys are generally expected to remain in the school to become primary wage-earners, while the girls are often thought to need less education to be wives and mothers” (2004, p. 61). In comparison to the restrictions placed on Ammu’s right to college education, despite of the poor and disappointing performances of Chacko at college, he was sent to Oxford for pursuing higher studies. Ammu became the victim of strong gender discrimination.
For Ammu Ayemenem house became a prison from which she sought an escape in the form of marriage. As a child, she witnessed Mammachi’s beatings at the hands of Pappachi in his study. Her skull was permanently scarred by the beatings with the brass flower vases. The drawing room of the Ayemenem house consolidated an image of the family’s male domination and gentility and that man had different standards and rules of life. Roy portrays Pappachi as strict and irrefutable head of the family. To reinforce his power, Pappachi displayed a portrait of himself on the drawing room wall, a depiction of himself in his ‘khaki jodhpurs’. In the photograph:

His light brown eyes were cordial yet reserved, as though he was making an effort to be civil to the photographer while plotting to murder his wife...A sort of contained cruelty. He wore khaki jodhpurs though he had never ridden a horse in his life. His riding boots reflected the photographer’s studio lights. An ivory-handled riding crop lay neatly across his lap. There was a watchful stillness to the photograph that lent an underlying chill to the warm room in which it hung. (Roy, 1997, p. 51)

Gaping out from the photograph, Pappachi’s image overlooked the drawing room, as though he was screening the room to ensure that the dignity was preserved there. His eagerness to maintain his public image was evident from the donations that he gave to the orphan houses and leprosy clinics so as to be known as the most generous and sophisticated man of the Ayemenem society. During the cold winter morning after beating Mammachi and Ammu, he used to expel them from the house. As Ammu remembered:

On one such night, Ammu, aged nine, hiding with her mother in the hedge, watched Pappachi’s natty silhouette in the lit windows as he flitted from room to room. Not content with having beaten his wife and daughter (Chacko was away at school), he tore down the curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp. (p. 181)
Roy’s idea of the house as a tool to oppress woman is explicit, not only in Ammu’s marital break-up, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the re-creation of space between Pappachi and Mammachi. Pappachi held complete authority over his wife. Das (1999) paraphrases Pappachi’s view of marriage as: “wife is but a slave who can be driven out of the house at his will and whose precious possessions like the piano can be as mercilessly broken” (p. 180). During their stay in Vienna; Mammachi took lessons in violin, but when her teacher informed Pappachi that she was very talented, he did not let her continue the lessons: “The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi’s teacher, Launsky-Tieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented” (Roy 1997, p. 50). Pappachi could not tolerate the fact that people actually liked Mammachi and appreciated her talented performances. As Mammachi became a successful businesswoman, Pappachi became envious of her. Pappachi oppressed her as he did not believe in women’s power over men or in the independence of women.

Despite Pappachi’s tyrannical attitude throughout their married life, Mammachi obeyed her husband’s commands and spent her life in a struggle to be an ideal wife. She was content not to have any right. After Pappachi’s retirement, Mammachi started making Pickles at commercial basis. However, being hooked up with pain of his retirement, Pappachi’s male chauvinism never allowed him to appreciate his wife’s professional achievements. More to it was the seventeen years of the age difference between the husband and wife, which took over Pappachi with hatred towards her as he “slouched around the compound… weaving sullen circles around the mounds of red chillies and freshly powdered yellow turmeric, watching Mammachi supervise the buying, the weighing, the salting and drying, of limes and tender mangoes” (p. 47). Later, it was only during one such critical instance of jealousy, when Pappachi was beating Mammachi in his study that Chacko posed a challenged to his authority. The grown up Chacko entered the study and seized his hand with a warning that “I never want this t happen ever gain.” he told his father.
Ever”(p. 48). Under the shock of Chackoo’s power over him, Pappachi renounced his relationship with Mammachi and did not talk to her till his death. However, he continued to use space as a tool for torturing the family. During the evenings, while sitting on the front verandah Pappachi pretended to stitch the buttons of his shirts that weren’t missing. His only intention was to give the impression to the visitors that his wife had been neglecting him.

Through the detailed illustration of her parents’ marital conflicts and tensions, Roy makes Ammu’s vulnerable status within the Ayemenem house as quite logical after her marital disgrace. Marriage in her family was simply a matter of compromise for a woman and was taken as her sole responsibility to sustain it. Roy’s discriminatory treatment of the divorced daughter and divorced son in the Ayemenem house suggests that the problems that divorce creates typically affects the lives of women. Thus, for Ayemenem house Ammu’s divorce was a sign of her failure. When Ammu returned to the Ayemenem house, Pappachi was living the last years of his life and by then it was Chacko who had taken over the ownership of the house.

Roy relies on the space and the ways in which the politics of space structures the experience of divorce differently for its male and female members. When Ammu returned to the Ayemenem house as a divorcée, she had to share the room with the old maid of the house. Even though the Ayemenem house was a grand house with many rooms, Roy epitomizes Ammu’s peripheral existence in the house by pointing out the room which Ammu inhabited was also the place which Kochu Maria, the old family cook had to share with her. The unwanted presence of Kochu Maria never left Ammu to relax her repressed emotions in the absence of the privacy of her room. In the most disturbing moments of her life, Ammu only had to recourse to the bathroom as her private space. Ammu’s image in the bathroom mirror as “pickled. Grey. Rheumy-eyed. Cross-stitch roses on a slack, sunken cheek” (p.222), stand in sharp comparison to Ammu’s feelings:
For herself, she knew there would be no more chances. There was only Ayemenem now. A front verandah and a back verandah. A hot river and a pickle factory. And in the background, the constant, high, whining mewl of local disapproval. (p. 43)

More noticeably, Roy depicts the ways in which Kochu Maria deliberately targeted the twins for her aggression because the presence of Ammu and her twins in the house had added to her duties in the kitchen. She used to spy on them and never missed the opportunity to report Mammchi about their every move inside the house. As she used to sleep on the floor of Ammu’s room, Kochu Maria found moments to express her hatred towards the children, as she said on a particular occasion when Estha was acting like Caesar in *Julius Caesar* and crashing on his bed like a stabbed corpse, “tell your mothers to take you to your father’s house’, she said. There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren’t your beds. This isn’t your house” (p. 83). On the contrary, when Chacko’s daughter and ex-wife-Sophie Mol and Margret Kochamma came from England to live in the house, Kochu Maria desperately tried to serve and impress them. Especially the day they arrived, her “tall, double-deckered WELCOME HOME OUR SOPHIE MOL cake” (p. 169), was iced with the hope that the day she’d grown up and become her Kochamma, not only she would raise her salary but also gift her nylon saris for Onam.

Roy has specifically worked out the problematic of Ammu’s oppression in the Ayemenem by depicting Ammu’s lack of control over the space of the room. When Mammachi discovered the secret of Ammu’s love for Valutha, her bedroom became her prison. Mammachi as an organizer of space in the Ayemenem house and the keeper of family tradition was mad with rage when Valutha’s father told her about Ammu’s nocturnal meetings with Valutha. She locked Ammu in her room and didn’t open the door of room till night when Chacko returned home and was told about the whole affair. Through the intrusion of Ammu’s room, Roy shows how social dictates persuaded women to bear the intrusion of her privacy. The privacy of Ammu’s bedroom was interrupted by the scrutiny of family members who in an effort to protect the honour of the
family controlled her sexual moves by locking her in the room. In Ammu’s old room; places provoke visions, once again plainly as the pictures of memory, the burdens of non forgetfulness. The room as the locus of Ammu’s dreams of shared intimacy with her children, of violence from Chacko, and finally of reunion for the twins points out unfair treatment of Ammu’s and Chacko’s desires and how their parents fulfilled or oppressed those desires. Roy’s narration purposefully contrast Mammachi’s act of locking Ammu in her bedroom with her act of building separate entrance for Chacko’s room to suggest that the ideological scriptures of the Ayemenem house applied differently to the male and female members of the family. Although, Mammachi was never comfortable with Chacko’s sexual relations with the female workers of the pickle factory, her silence over the issue was carried in her theory of “Man’s Needs” (p. 168). Whereas, Chacko’s room not only privileged his privacy, but also shielded his sexuality, the room Ammu occupied precluded any rebellion from family norms and decorum.

It’s through Rahel’s remembrance of the past that Roy reveals the family tragedy and what exactly happened that evening when Chacko threatened her mother with breaking every bone in her body. Tickell (2007) suggests that space reveals the identity of people living in the house. The use of psychoanalytical images of rooms in a house as symbols of mental architecture enhance the double effect: both an announcement, and a memory, a key to the exploration of the past by the narration. (Tickell 2007, p. 151) In drawing Ammu’s room as the crucial site of contestation, Roy deliberately calls attention to the ways that domestic spaces are organized to maintain male control over women of the house. Rahel’s presence in the room where Ammu locked herself after the death of Valutha suggests the same status and position she was going to have in the house. She remembered:

The bedroom with blue curtains and yellow wasps that worried the window panes. The bedroom whose walls would soon learn their harrowing secrets. The bedroom into which Ammu would first be locked and then lock herself. Whose door Chacko, crazed by grief,
four days after Sophie Mol’s funeral, would batter down. The bedroom into which Ammu would first be locked and then lock herself. Whose door, Chacko, crazed by grief, four days after Sophie Mol’s funeral, would batter down. (p. 225)

Rahel’s memories of the most intense moments of her mother’s last days in the house reveal that the very space of Ammu’s room turned hostile towards her and she had no way to combat her oppression. Because of her libertine involvement with Valutha and the ensuing incident of Sophie Mol’s death, Ammu was expelled from the Ayemenem house. Thus, Rahel’s memories of the Ayemenem house serve as the ‘history of the present’, that target the space in which Ammu was being positioned before her marriage and which influenced Ammu’s later life when she returned to stay in the Ayemenem house as a ‘husbandless-woman’:

Perhaps, Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors. But it wasn’t just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tempered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. (p. 31)

During her last visit, Mammachi had warned Ammu to seldom visit the house. Though she was terribly sick under the severe attacks of asthma, Mammachi and Chacko remained totally cold and indifferent towards her. The very instance of Chacko’s exclusion of Ammu from the house shows the gaps in power. He literally ejected Ammu from the family house because she resisted what she was expected to take as her fate in order to protect the family’s honour. Ammu, in her failure to make the space work for her had the only option of departing from the house silently. Ultimately, her death in a cheap hotel room is thus concluded by Roy as the ultimate level of her subalternity. Years later, Rahel could not repress the painful memories of Chacko’s cruelty towards her mother and the way he pushed her mother out of the room, “the room to which, years
later, Rahel would return and watch a silent stranger bathe. And wash his clothes with crumbling bright soap” (Roy 1997, p. 227).

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the History House in the narrative became the space of the subaltern. The image of the History House not only worked on the metaphorical level where “the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much.”(p. 177). It enacts as an oscillation between the secrets of history and the powers of the past on the present and also as an actual place on the other side of the Ayemenem river which had lain empty for years after the suicide of its owner, Kari Saipu. It was rumoured that the ghost of Kari Sapu used to roam in the house and therefore people hesitated to even enter the house in the broad daylight: The image of the History House was most directly evoked in the chapter eighteen of the novel, which is titled by Roy as The History House. Rahel remembered the scenes of the History House, where Valutha, (the man, which Ammu loved by night and her twins loved by day) was beaten to death by the policemen:

A house. The History House. Whose doors were locked and windows open. With cold stone floors and billowing, ship-shaped shadows on the walls. Where waxy ancestors with tough toe nails and breath that smelled of yellow maps whispered papery whispers. Where translucent lizards lived behind old paintings. Where dreams were captured and re-dreamed. (p. 306)

The implications of this redefinition of the History House as a living space are elaborated in the scenes where Ammu crossed the river at night in a small boat that Valutha had built for the twins and had meetings with the man of her dreams, the place where the twins had set their little world with a grass mat, pots and pans, inflatable goose, Qantas koala, ballpoint pens, multi-coloured pairs of socks, plastic sunglasses and the watch with time painted on it. However, the same space turned into a theatrical space by the police officers who had come there to catch the suspects of
Sophie Mols murder. Police’s act of brutal smashing and torturing of Valutha and stuffing their pockets with the childish toys of the twins became the demonstration to destroy Ammu and her twins’ efforts to inhabit a space of privacy impelled by “feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear—civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, power’s fear of powerlessness” (p. 308).

4.3  *My Feudal Lord*  (1994)

Tehmina’s narration places strong emphasis on the image of the house—particularly on the role played by the domestic space in her oppression as a divorcee. The narration of *My Feudal Lord* is divided into sections devoted to the memories of her life spent in three separate houses. Part one deals with her life in the parental house as well as Mustafa Khar’s family background, marriages and political career, part two recounts thirteen years of her married life that she spent in Mustafa Khar’s house, and part three portrays Tehmina as a divorced woman who tried to establish her identity for herself in a house that had no male head to rule. The focal point of the novel focus is Tehmina’s marital house, as she devotes extended attention to her marital house where she spent the prime time of her life, making every possible effort to save her marriage, though the her efforts remained futile.

Tehmina, like her contemporary Indian female novelists has relied heavily on the house as a symbol of patriarchal domination. The house is indicative of a given culture’s view of gender, marriage, ethnicity, and divorce. Through the treatment of the domestic space as a space where power is instigated by the husband, Tehmina illustrates the way her marginality was endorsed by the domestic space and impelled her to tolerate the troubled marital oppression for full thirteen years of her youth. The thirteen years of Tehmina’s married life in Mustafa Khar’s house constitutes the major portion of the narrative. She narrates the painful memories of her distressed relationship with Mustafa Khar by employing the image of the house, which effectively
articulates the centrality of the domestic space in the development of her stigmatic identity as a divorcee. Yet her courage to leave the suffocative atmosphere of her marital house suggests that she could retrieve some of her autonomy, “I left Mustafa Khar’s house for the fourth and final time. There had been too many false starts towards freedom. This time my decision was irrevocable” (p. 357). Realizing how powerfully the domestic space had worked to marginalize her, Tehmina’s statement reflects the argument that “it is easier to wash dishes in the husband’s house than in the outside world: the sexual politics of domestic space are designed to control women’s sexuality, but an awareness of how those spaces work allows women to assess the damage that has been done and begin again ‘in a new direction” (p. 42). This developing consciousness was pronounced within her text as: “I had fallen into the classic trap of the Pakistani woman. The goal is marriage and, once achieved, the future is a life of total subordination” (p. 100). She portrays her troubled marriage in the following words:

There was not a day that Mustafa did not hit me …. I just tried my best not to provoke him … I was afraid that my slightest response to his advances would reinforce his image of me as a common slut. This was a feudal hang – up: his class believed that a woman was an instrument of a man’s carnal pleasure. If the woman ever indicated that she felt pleasure, she was a potential adulteress, not to be trusted. Mustafa did not even realize that he had crushed my sensuality. I was on automatic pilot … responding as much as was important to him, but never feeling anything myself. If he was satisfied, there was a chance that he would be in better humour. It was at these times that I realized that prostitution must be a most difficult profession. (p. 260)

Exploiting the symbol of the house as a site of a female oppression, Durrani’s narrative presents domestic space as a controlled space ruled by the male, family head. The sexual and physical tortures which Tehmina suffered while living in Mustafa Khar’s house script the way male sexual privilege is protected by the house itself. Bedroom, torture-room, stairways, landings, are all
envisioned by Tehmina as the margins of domestic space-oppressive to her because of the strict discipline and watchful eye of her husband. This is similar to Wigley’s idea of space when he says, “marriage is the reason for building a house. The house appears to make a space for the institution. But marriage has been already spatial. It cannot be thought outside the house that is its condition of possibility before its space” (1992, p. 336). As reproduction demands privacy and as marriage entails husband and wife sharing the same domestic space, Wigley (1992) states that architecture function as an essential component of marriage. Therefore, it is the house, in other words that makes marriage a possibility by providing the space that man and woman can occupy together so reproduction can occur. Further, Wigley (1992) holds that space as an early concept of the bedroom. Being a significant basis of the institutions of marriage and family, the bedroom represents a space that is particularly invested in creating the marginality of the women. Traditionally, the bedroom is a room where people retreat when they are sick, where they go to sleep, where they seek safety for their bodies and minds. In other words, the bedroom is a “space people inhabit when they are particularly vulnerable” (Cantrel 2004, p. 26).

To Tehmina marital bedroom gave Mustafa ample opportunity to abuse her, as she remembered, “it had been dark in the bedroom that night in Pakistan-so long ago –when he first beat me severely” (p. 181). By staying in the same bedroom with her, he had the power to torment her, so much so that she dreaded the night as “night was the time when I had to face him alone. Night was when he had no other distractions and could concentrate his fury upon me” (Durrani 1994, p. 181). Mustafa was not a traditional Pakistani husband, but treated Tehmina merely as a possession and not as companion as he allowed her to “drink wine, but only in his presence and when he chose” (Durrani, 1994, p. 107). Mustafa loved Tehmina, no doubt, but he loved her as his possession and slave. They had entered into a love marriage, produced children, but their relationship was not that of equals. His physical abuse of the wife stemmed from his sense of male privilege as he belonged to the class that treats a woman as an instrument for a
man’s carnal pleasure. Any sign of sexual pleasure on the part of women is taken as a proof of adulterous nature. But she took his abusive nature as a socially sanctioned male privilege, particularly as her mother once advised her: “if a husband behaves in a strange or unreasonable way, you should treat him like a sick human being, like someone who needs medical care and treatment”(Durrani 1994, p. 130).

Tehmina in detailing the abuse that she suffered during the years that she had spent in Mustafa’s house had challenged the double moral standards of the society. He used to tell Tehmina frankly about his sexual encounter with numerous women and has shown the cruel face of the social set up where men can enjoy all sorts of sexual proximities, whereas for a woman even a legitimate relationship with another man can become a point of guilt for the rest of her life. Since Mustafa had lots of sexual encounters before his marriage, he had no moral justification behind his abusing Tehmina to have one. Tehmina underwent severe beatings for her previous marriage, but Mustafa never even felt ashamed for his mistakes of the similar nature. Mustafa’s rigid feudal ideas about a female ‘as an instrument of a man’s carnal pleasure’(p. 106), rendered him incapable to develop an intimate companionship with Tehmina, which she passionately longed for. Indeed, Mustafa was not only a man with feudal background and mentality, but also a different kind of man altogether. He was obsessed by his narrow domineering attitude towards Tehmina. He used to treat her brutally like a sex object not as a companion in marriage. As Tehmina says: “I was an automatic pilot responding as much as was important for him, but never feeling anything for myself. If we were satisfied, there was a chance that he would be in a better humour. It was at these times that I realized that prostitution must be a most difficult profession” (p. 107).

Tehmina who had been raised up in the affluent but the repressive atmosphere of her parents’ house, longed to have a sense of freedom and equality in her husband’s house. Even in
her marriage with Mustafa she remained unhappy and failed to find a reciprocal involvement in her marriage. There was no question of choice or chance of self-determination. While Mustafa himself was a man of loose morals and had married many times, but he always considered Tehmina’s divorce as a serious moral offence as “He continued to use my first marriage as a stick to beat me with; my divorce and remarriage had proved to him that I was capable of adultery” (p. 106). The fact of Tehmina’s first marriage and divorce had spoiled their whole relationship. Tehmina, however, could not be blamed for this for Mustafa knew about her first marriage. It was actually his fatalistic fascination for Tehmina that destroyed her relation with Anees. When Tehmina entered into Mustafa’s life she was in love with him, but Mustafa always suspected her and tried to crush her dignity. He persisted in knowing about personal details of her first marriage, and had often beaten her for having lost her virginity in her first marriage. Mustafa, a man with feudal mentality neither stopped ill-treating her nor let Tehmina forgot about her previous breakup. Mustafa often used to torture her physically, but the psychological damage was worst as the narrator reports “sometimes even a sullen look would send him into a rage. Who are you thinking of Anees?’ he demanded. I was suspect because I had betrayed a husband; my track record sentenced me repeatedly” (p. 106). Tehmina was Mustafa’s sixth wife, however, he could not forget about her past—he used to inquire about her relationship with Anees to insult her.

It was Mustafa’s nature to turn his wife both physically and mentally slave. He had no control over his behaviour-he could not bear the idea of his wife with another man- even if it was a past husband. Her acceptance of Mustafa’s cruelty is the effect of the patriarchal value which instills a sense of deprivation into the spirit of womanhood. This stretches out to sexual control of the wife by the husband. Patriarchal discourse does not consider sex as a source of shared bodily pleasure but somewhat as a tool of authority. Tehmina bears insults and humiliation fearing the stigma of divorce. The basic teaching imparted to the women of her society is to accept every injustice as her fate and not to go public with any personal crisis which may harm
the “honour” of her man. However, even social constraints have their limits. Owing to the patriarchal codes of conduct Tehmina spent fourteen years with a man, who nearly drowned her, and who has no qualms in locking her into a room and striking her with the butt of a rifle. Tehmina highlights how thoroughly he dominated her while she catalogued the injuries she had suffered at his hands. For fourteen years, Tehmina suffered alone, in silence. Her daughters suffer, and the maids in her house lead equally traumatized and abused lives. She has a vivid reminiscence of most of the beating she received:

Suddenly he threw me down onto the bed and jumped on me. Sitting astride my belly, he slapped me in the face repeatedly with his open palm, forehand and backhand. The sounds of his blows seemed too loud to remain confined to the four walls of the room. I fought to stifle my screams as he pulled at my hair, thrusting my head from side to side. Like lightning, he leaped off me. One hand clutched my long, braided hair and jerked me off the bed and onto the floor. I felt a wetness run down my legs, but had no time to realize that my bladder lacked the strength to face this kind of fear. He threw me against a wall, picked me up and threw me against another one - again, and again, and again. I no longer knew what was happening. Something burst in my ears. I felt an agonizing pain in my eyes. Something split. Something swelled. Then the pain merged into one deep, enthralling sense of agony. ( p. 102-103)

The occasion for this particular beating was that Mustafa was resentful that Tehmina might have romantically reacted to the sexual advancements of her first husband. It did not matter that Mustafa had ruined Safia’s life, that he had also married Naubahar, that he had visited Safia for mere hours in the course of their seven-years of marriage, that he did not love her. Feudal laws allow men to act in such a manner, but for a wife to betray husband was a supreme sin. The pride of lord’s honour evolves from his women, so he enforced his authority and supervision over the sexuality of the wife. This absolute control over the wife had nothing to do with love, only with
the fear of the male’s tarnished honour. Torturing Tehmina by inquiring her sexual relationship with Anees is titillating for Mustafa because it reinforces his self-image as a man powerful enough to reduce a woman to such a dire fate, while he himself can practice infidelity without any serious consequences. After being brutally beaten by him, she could not even recognize her reflection in the mirror:

Slowly, I raised my eyes to the mirror. I gasped in fresh fright at the monster who gazed back at me. A shiver ran through me….My braid had opened and my long hair was wild and strewn, like a witch’s. The right side of the nose had disappeared, merging into a swollen cheek. My lips protruded in an exaggerated and grotesque pout. My eyes were deeply sunk in huge, purple patches; one of them hurt badly and was bloodshot. A piercing pain screamed in one ear. The left side of my nose was matted with blood. I pulled at it and tufts of hair came out in my hands. I rinsed my mouth and tasted blood.

(p. 102-103)

Mustafa had beaten her on this particular occasion while probing Tehmina about her first marriage. Mustafa’s abuse of Tehmina, therefore, served his own desires while it simultaneously reinforces the social hierarchy by keeping Tehmina (his sixth wife) under the watchful surveillance of her second husband, in whose life women entered speedily and left just as quickly. While she was subjected to his abuse and his close observation of her, she was not likely to put across her position by crushing her sensuality as well “I was an automatic pilot, responding as much as was important for him, but never feeling anything for myself. If he was satisfied, there was a chance he would be in better humour. It was at these times I realized that prostitution must be a most difficult profession” (Durrani1994, p. 107). In her society, married women were expected to be sexually passive and submissive to their husbands; men are the initiators of sex and also set the conditions for the sexual encounter. On the same note, Messer (2004) states that women are expected to satisfy the sexual desires of their husbands. As a result, when a “husband
wants sex, the wife should comply because that is part of the marriage contract” (Messer 2004, p. 33).

Tehmina’s response to the surveillance and abuse she encountered was, “my priorities were clear. I had to keep my marriage together for the sake of my children and myself. I had invested too much pain and compromise in this relationship to let it go now” (p. 217). Tehmina depicts this bedroom incident as a catalyst not only for surveillance, but also for his strong sense of ownership of her body. After beating her severely, however, he cleverly manipulated her by conditioning her to believe that this was a personal and private matter between husband and wife. He warned her humiliation at his hands was less than if she exposed it to people. Mustafa exploited her wife’s naiveté, and she had no other way but to accept his explanation. Therefore, when he left for Islamabad, “I waited quietly in the bedroom for four days, pretending not to be there. The time I spent in hiding made me even more convinced that exposure of my husband’s violence would reduce me to Sherry’s position” (p. 105). This represents a particularly brutal example of a wife to being taught to keep herself/other boundaries permeable: the less she would expose her husband’s violence, the more people will respect her. He used to beat her routinely, but when she begged her parents for help by presenting her bruises as evidence of the abuse, her parents returned a verdict by speaking in a traditional manner, “you can leave his home in coffin” (p. 126).

The blind eye that the family turned towards her suggests that wives are expected to tolerate their husbands’ irrational behaviour. Mustafa’s behaviour was ignored and tolerated precisely because her family did not want her to live the rest of her life as a two-time divorcee, and wanted her children to be raised in a stable home. However, her protests became feeble once she realized that her family will not understand her problems, she reconciled with her brute husband. The final blow came after Tehmina became pregnant again and unforeseen circumstances compelled her to visit a male doctor. This injured Mustafa’s enormous ego and he
took Tehmina’s visit to a male doctor as an unforgivable act whereby she has slighted his ego. He had beaten the pregnant Tehmina brutally. This was the occasion that for the first time in her life, she considered divorce, but realized that she may lose the custody of her daughter. So she once again reconciled with her destiny: Tehmina reflected on her situation, “a prisoner ultimately settles into a monotonous routine. Anger recedes, senses dull. The spirit is crushed” (p. 87).

Despite suffering terribly in her marital life, still the choice of divorce was not an easy option for her. As she was aware of the social undesirability of divorce for a woman, where marriage is regarded as the only future available to women. While Tehmina is ostensibly writing about her personal divorce experience, she regularly interjects comments about the general social perception of divorce; she writes “we were taught that marriage was a sacred and irrevocable institution. If a husband turned out to be a brute, it was the wife’s duty to persevere until she changed her character. A broken marriage was a reflection of woman’s failure” (p. 29). In the traditional Pakistani society, within patriarchal set up, “marriage is an all-encompassing part of women’s lives” (Patel 2003, p. 1), whereas a “divorcee in Pakistan has been always a prime target for malicious gossip” (Durrani 1994, p. 85). When she decided to rebel, the price she paid was extremely high. She secured her independence by losing custody of her children, living at the mercy of her family and friends, just because she was neither independent nor socially allowed to make herself independent with her own rights.

After years of abuse and beatings, Tehmina’s house and bedroom did not offer her the security and shelter of the married life. So much so that while staying in her parent’s house because of her severe illness, she was not allowed the privacy of her room. Her lines reveal how much she was under her husband’s surveillance even in her parents’ house, “He left the room but insisted that I leave a door open. I wanted oblivion. I turned out the lights and crouched in the corner of the room. I wanted to crawl into my mother’s womb. Contorting my body into the fetal position, I wept” (p. 220). Her statement reflects the argument that the sexual politics of domestic
space are designed to control women’s sexuality. The bedroom shared with her husband never offered her any actual privacy. In her most desperate moments, Tehmina ran towards the bathroom. Indeed, Tehmina evaded to the bathroom whenever she was distressed. She ran to the bathroom to see her bruised body, after being beaten by Mustafa. At times she also sought shelter in the bathroom from Mustafa’s unleashed wrath. Looking at her reflection in the mirror, Tehmina went to the washroom to speculate about her married life. Away from her husband’s close observation, Tehmina gained as much privacy as she could from those escapes to the bathroom. In her narration, Tehmina uses the image of the mirror as the only thing that offered her the true reflection of her identity:

Standing before the mirror, I noticed how much I had changed from the young girl who had fallen in love with this controversial, much older man…. In amazement, I shook my head at my image. I had always wondered about Mustafa, analysed and assessed him. But today the major neglected question surfaced: what was I all about? (p. 253)

Lingering in the bathroom was her only recourse to time alone, but even that this attempted privacy had its limitations: “suddenly I was terrified that I had remained too long in the bathroom. I stumbled back into the bedroom, shaken drained and near collapse” (p. 103). Keeping a close watch on the amount of time she spent in the bathroom, Mustafa used to bang the door after some time. Durrani emphasizes how fanatically Mustafa controlled and monitored her every move, “I looked into a mirror and told myself sadly that perhaps I had to change too. I must look like her. I must dress like her. I must change my whole personality to resemble hers. May be my marriage would work then… The mirror stared back”(p. 355). Finally, towards the end, her so called room of her own turned into her prison. After her fourth and final decision to leave the Mustafa’s house, when she went there on her daughter’s birthday, the bathroom of her once marital bedroom turned into her cage, “he was on me instantly. Grabbing my wrists, he pushed me into
the bathroom, slammed the door, and locked me inside” (p. 360). However, she was no more a submissive wife. She started screaming and crying to the point that he instantly released her:

Mustafa opened the bathroom door. I was sullen, wary and scared, but pretended not to be. He picked up a bottle of Valium 10, extracted two tablets and offered them to me. I tried to resist, but he utilized the same method he had employed with his dogs. He overpowered me, pushed the pills into my mouth and forced water down my throat, hолing my nostrils until I was compelled to swallow. (p. 361)

This episode highlights the same place which a woman takes as a room of her own can be turned by the male as her prison, Tehmina realizes this fact through the bedroom episode. This scene is ominous in its descriptions of Mustafa, who became upset about the repercussions of Tehmina’s resistance and finally released her suggests that once she mustered her courage to break free the oppressive marital relationship, even a tyrant like Mustafa Khar could not subdue her. But what made Tehmina to resist was her fears regarding his cruelty, “He could and would spirit me off to the tribal areas adjoining the remote village of Kot Addu, where, I would live as his prisoner until-who knew when? Forever, perhaps” (p. 360).

The marital bedroom, Tehmina illustrates offered her scarce happiness and safety like her parental house. Thus Tehmina-Mustafa relationship revealed the prejudiced side of patriarchy where she lived in an atrocious space and faced physical and emotional tortures because of strong social conventions, she could not escape the house of marriage, and therefore, she accepts these things as the part of her destiny. Tehmina was by nature compliant and docile. She tried to please him and to save her marriage. She willingly accepted her role as a submissive wife and accepted Mutafa’s atrocities as a part of her faith. Actually Tehmina only left his house at the end where Mustafa had developed an illicit relation with her younger sister. It was with a sense of dismay
that she had walked out of the house. She left her husband’s house and figuratively rejected the house as a space that sanctified the marriage as a patriarchal institution:

I was desperate to get out. Nothing in this house that I had decorated with such loving interested me. All my possessions, collected over the years from various remote areas of my country, now seemed distant from me. Every single thing in this house had held some meaning, yet nothing was meaningful enough for me to want to stay. (p. 362)

The basic teaching imparted to every woman in her patriarchal society was to remain a silent spectator, even as a victim to any injustice meted out by the man and to be very careful of not going public with any personal crisis which may harm the “honour” of her man. Although the severity of Mustafa’s oppression is comparable to the panopticism described by Foucault, Tehmina never completely internalized that surveillance. She had moments when she did not submit to the discipline of the space, such as the day Tehmina confided the guests that the dark glasses she was wearing, was to veil the black scar under her eye which Mustafa had beaten her to. The moment guests left, Mustafa headed upstairs and ordered her to follow. But “I had no intention of going willingly to my punishment, so I slipped into a side room and locked the door behind me”(p. 214), and refused to come out despite his severe threats.

However, the reason behind Tehmina’s divorce was not the abusive treatment that she met with in her husband’s house, but her husband’s incestuous relationship with Adila, her younger sister. Tehmina was devastated that her sister could be so shameless to destroy her house;

I saw fire engulf me in the mirror. Would death be worse than life? Suicide is a ticket to hell. I moved quickly away, feeling the numbness in my head. No, I decided, nothing could be worse than life. I staggered into the bedroom and sat alone, starting at the palm
of my hand, examining the fate line. The line began to sway and shift. I reeled and slipped to the floor. I watched a wave billow over me, spraying me with peace. (p. 137)

To secure her married status, Tehmina was dutiful and obedient to Mustafa and seemingly followed every rule of the house as, “I did not want to live the rest of my life as a two-time divorcee, and I wanted my children to be raised in a stable home, if that was possible” (p. 223). She was not allowed to go out alone, nor read the newspaper. She obeyed without a squeak of protest, “I had fallen into the classic trap of the Pakistani women. The goal is marriage and, once achieved, the future is a life of total subordination. I had no power, no rights, and no will of my own” (p. 100). Tehmina in the course of the narration shows the way she internalized the social ethos in accepting and perpetuating her continued subjugation by her husband, becoming the much-abused-yet-virtuously-patient wife. For “the lesson was clear and I learned it well: blind acquiescence was necessary to gain approval; being yourself earned only condemnation. I was acceptable only when I was unlike myself–whoever that was–because I wore a mask of submission” (p. 25). She suffered and remained silent for fear of getting divorced. As Patel (2007) comments:

Stigma to divorce by the wife is deep-rooted, stemming as it does from years of custom, traditions, and law. Even today, there is the stigma attached to divorce, which makes it difficult for a wife to dissolve the oppressive relationship either out of court or through legal processes. This stigma is understandable when one recalls that until the late 1930s, Muslim women’s right to dissolution of marriage was denied in law and it was only recognized and applied by the statute of 1939. (p. 90)

Tehmina remembers being cunningly cheated by him to make her believe that, “my humiliation at his hands was relatively less than if it exposed to others. This was a personal and the private matter between my husband and me. We would work it out. I wanted no-one to know-least of all
my mother” (p. 104). Tehmina also points out her family’s reservations that never encouraged her to recourse to divorce, no matter how much it was difficult to live with him. They also urged the two not to file for divorce. To her dismay, her father told her, in the fashion of a typical father of the society, “you can only leave his home in a coffin” (p. 86). Before she knew about the illicit affair between her younger sister Adila and Mustafa, Tehmina accepted her married life believing in his father’s words that, “a marriage he said was a confluence of grief and happiness”(p. 37), in wholly feminine terms, assuming that her marriage to Mustafa was written in her for a “man was the only future available to a Pakistani girl” (p. 28). Her family’s lack of support further encouraged Mustafa to treat her callously, to make matters worse; he developed a sexual relationship with her younger sister Adila, while abusing her daily. After her repeated failures to save her marriage Tehmina started analysing her life, “What had happened to me? Why did I not react like a normal human being to insult and humiliation? I understood that my husband had crushed my spirit… He had led me into the maze, and I did not know how to find my way out” (p. 187).

Tehmina blaming solely her sister for seducing Mustafa made efforts to protect her husband’s honour in her parent’s house. When Tehmina raised her voice against this shocking affair, her husband instead of being shameful and apologetic, battered her with the butt of his double-barreled shotgun and stripped her naked. This incident had a very crumbling effect on her mind and body: “This episode would cripple my spirit perhaps beyond salvation. From this moment forward it would be nearly impossible for me to function as an individual. There was not one iota of self- esteem left. The shame had burned it down to ashes”(p. 158). Tehmina filed for separation under the court of law in England and left her husband’s house.

Her feet, stalled outside her mother’s old house-her birthplace. Once a lively family home, it now stood abandoned in a row of other nondescript houses with their tall wooden doors. Her hands trembling, Gulshan reached up and pulled the heavy aluminum chain down. With the palms of her hands she thrust the doors open, climbed the concrete step and entered her old home. (p. 13)

In *Typhoon*, Qaisra Shahraz has established domestic space as a site of social relations that were controlled by power and was central to the establishment and maintenance of subaltern identity of its female protagonist, Naghmana. *Typhoon* revolves round the ‘homelessness’ of the couple (Naghmana and Haroon), in a society where house provides the site of self-surveillance in order to ascertain the compliance of an individual’s behavior to the social norms. Though marriage is a relationship that is publicly announced, however, privacy is its defining characteristic. The privacy of the domestic space seemingly brackets sexuality (an important constituent of marriage) off by limiting intrusions from the outside world and closeting it from observation, but Shahraz insists that this relationship cannot be divorced from its context, from the village’s belief system about marriage. In the village Chiraghpur, marriage, though a personal matter was a socially constructed institution that demanded to be announced publicly and necessitated the privacy of the domestic space. For in the society, house symbolized the materiality, fixity, and realism of a couple’s marriage: house stood as not only a token of happiness but also that of security. As one of another female character, Chaudharani Kaniz voiced this reality: “I love this home. You know why I married Sarwar. It was for his wealth and this home. I am not ashamed to say it. Well, I have all that now. I have this large haveli and dozens of marabas of land” (p. 86). As such absence of domestic space, in case of Naghmana and Haroon’s marriage turned their legitimate relationship to suspects as in Chiraghpur: “no body dared. For no man lifted an eye at a young woman, let alone a married man committing adultery with a virtual stranger-no matter how
attractive the woman happened to be” (p. 25). As the house belongs to marriage, adultery romantically occurs outside the house. So the legitimate relationship of a husband and wife was mistaken as an adulterous act by the village folk of Chiraghpur. That is how, after twenty years of her return to the village, Gulshan is standing near the old village well “recalled the sight of Haroon’s face bent over the woman’s, his arms reaching around her, holding her close. The woman’s head was pressed intimately against his chest” (p. 11).

Within the post-colonial context, the institution of marriage necessitates the privacy of space. The house is central to the eastern ideologies of marriage. As Freeman (2003) holds that marriage is the reason for building a house. The house appears to make a space for the institution of marriage and is most sacred within the privacy of domestic space. On the contrary, a secret marriage in the absence of the marital house is open to suspects. Even at times the couple is not given the chance to defend themselves. But marriage is already spatial. It cannot be thought outside the house that is its condition of the possibility before its space. Since, “women are responsible for maintaining the family honour. To ensure they don’t dishonour their families, society limits women’s mobility, places restrictions on their behaviour and activities, and permits them only limited contact with the opposite sex” (Awan 2004, p. 64). The power of this ideology is verified by Qaisra’s narrative Typhoon. As Haroon’s mother-in-law, Hajra, accused Naghma publicly and interrupted her when the village head questioned Naghma about the nature of her relationship with Haroon. Hajra proclaimed, “Buzurgh Sahib, what can this hussy say? This whore! This man eater, who goes around stealing other women’s husbands from their beds at night times” (p. 158).

Naghma’s tragedy lies within the centre of the politics of location. She defied the boundaries of the house and came out of her aunt’s house in the mid of the night to meet her lost husband-Haroon. Shahraz relies heavily upon the image of a house and proclaims the equation of marriage with its house explicitly. Unfortunately, not given any chance to explain the nature of
the couple’s relationship, the absence of their marital home became the reason of their divorce. The succinct occasion of Naghmana reuniting with her lost husband after five years secretly in the mid of the night, in a public space forms the base of the novel, for the marital relationship holds worth only within a private space of a house, not in the public.

*Typhoon* places great emphasis on the house as a symbol of marriage throughout the novel. Several different houses are evoked in the novel: however, the focus of this section is the houses that Naghmana inhabits. Prominent among them are the four houses -Baba Siraj Din’s *haveli* that symbolizes the feudal culture and norms of the village, the house of Naghmana’s aunt Fatima where she came as a guest, and that later turned out as her prison, the *haveli* of Chaudharani Kaniz –the young widow, and the house of Haroon’s mother-in-law. The house of Haroon’s mother-in-law follows in the same continuum as Naghmana’s aunt's home in the village. As places of escape or retreat, these homes are reminders of connections with the patriarchal culture as well as in the past. Shahraz’s illustration of each of the houses that Naghmana inhabited framed her subaltern identity at different periods of her life, “a whore, wife and the divorsee” (p. 122). The theme that runs through the novel – and through the several houses in it –is the idea of domestic space as both the basis of marital oppression, but also as a space from which marital relationship draws its strength. Caught first by Haroon’s second wife and then his impulsive mother-in-law, is what creates the tragedy of the novel:

Briskly she reached the fields and followed the path leading to the old village well and the banyan tree. As she turned the corner, Hajra’s breath caught in her throat. The stars and the moon beamed light over the fields, illuminating the two figures sitting on the edge of the well. To Hajra it was as if the earth gave way from under her feet. She watched with horror as Haroon leaned over and touched the woman on her face. (p. 25)
This scene is important because it sets up the issue of boundaries between the public and private surrounding the institution of marriage. This disruption of the privacy marks the end of Naghmana’s marriage—as her marriage had passed beyond the outer door of the house marking a rupture in the life of the village, forcing her to choose between honour and love. Since, “the institution of marriage itself marks one boundary between the public and private. On one level, a wedding is a very public ceremony and declaration, but it is a public declaration of a private relationship. It marks the end of public and chaperoned courtship” (p. 33). As Baba Siraj Din later confessed to Gulshan, “This unfortunate event took place because of your mother’s intervention. She wanted a kacheri—she bullied me into it. Only Allah knows what would have happened if we were not all here today” (p. 177). The aim of their houses was not simply domesticity or privacy, but the spectacle and notoriety, something to be covered in village talk. It was the mother-in-law living in the same house that turned things to worst. Before leaving for the house of Fatima she advised her daughter to “keep away from that beast. Don’t speak to him or make him any breakfast with him. He deserves nothing. Don’t listen to him, if he comes near you” (p. 39). So much so that when Naghmana was asked by the Baba to clear her position in front of the village kacheri, she again interrupted, “Buzurgh Sahib, what can this hussy say? This whore! This man-eater who goes around stealing other woman’s husbands from their beds at night… She is a haramzadi, a slut, a menace to our civilized society. She has ensnared my son-in-law” (p. 158).

The implications of such strong interventions are obvious, particularly when paralleled with the prevalence of Naghmana’s aunt harsh denial of Naghmana’s and Haroon’s pleas to have one meeting with one another before the kacheri:

Slapping Naghmana’s hands away, Fatima stood against the door and shouted back to Haroon. ‘Done nothing wrong? Get away, you haramzada! Have you not done enough—ruining all our lives? Was your Gulshan not enough for your lust? I will not open the
door to you; shaitan. You can see this slut in the kacheri. Then you can say what you want to say to her in front of the village audience. (p. 118)

Throughout the novel, the tragedy of the troubled couple is ignited by the boundaries of the house. Like Naghmana, Haroon also made several efforts to see her, “Outside in the lane Haroon frantically carried on banging on Fatima’s door, bruising his fist. Then kicking it with his booted foot, he turned from the door and stood in the middle of the lane, wondering what to do, where to turn”(p. 120). The juxtaposition here is telling. The house itself seems to be reacting to the affair, as Naghmana was locked in the dark room:

“Please, Auntie’! By now, Naghmana was faint with fear.’ Have mercy. Either let me talk to him or let me escape! Don’t take me to the kacheri, please Auntie, I am innocent!’ Grabbing her niece by the wrist, she dragged her across the courtyard and pulled her up the stairs. Reaching her room, Fatima pushed Naghmana inside and then closed the door on her shocked face, bolting it from the outside. ‘You will stay locked in here until it is the time for you to face the kacheri. (p. 118)

There are many references to houses as marriages begin to unravel in Typhoon, too many to mention in detail. Marriage though a personal relationship needs to be announced publicly, since Naghmana and Haroon did not confide their families about their legitimate relationship, their secret meeting in the open without the protection of the firewall of the house was looked upon as an act of adultery. This suspicion of adulterous meeting shocked the whole village and became the reason for their unfortunate divorce.

In a scene where village kacheri was set, the whole village gathered in the courtyard of village mudrassah. The men, women and even little children were present there. As everybody was aware of the reason for this meeting, derogatory comments were passed on Nghanmana’s
character. As soon as the village head entered the courtyard there was total silence. He took the front seat reserved for him along with his two *shegirds* and stared at the faces of villagers “noting who was present. It was a grave affair they were all going to be dealt with. In a strange way he was glad that women were here too” (p. 152). He summoned the accused in front of everyone.

Thus, for Naghmana the *kacheri* became a panoptican as all the eyes were set on Baba:

> The books of Shariah law were prominently placed in front of him and he had studied them thoroughly, spending two hours reading up on the subject of adultery. To make sure he had consulted his two *shegirds*. His eyes trace the leather binding of the books, their engraved covers with gold calligraphic designs. Siraj Din marveled at the painstaking work by artists and craftsman. (p. 153)

From the above quoted passage of *Typhoon*, it becomes evident that Shahraz like Durrani donot blamed religion for the oppression that Naghmana faced in her life; rather she has shown how the misinterpretation and disregard of Islamic codes facilitates a female subordination in an orthodox society. The fact that religion has been a driving force in human life is unquestioned. It can therefore act as a basic source of information and enlightenment about women. However, Shahraz has challenged the authoritarian and patriarchal readings of Shariah that overwhelmingly influenced the life and future of Naghmana. The novelist has used the word of ‘Shariah books’, which suggests the religious law code, which is based on the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), and is the ideal system to spend life in accordance with Islamic teachings. However, like everything based on religion, it is open to interpretation or misinterpretation. According to Islamic principles in the case of reporting the adultery, accusation necessitates four eyewitnesses to establish the culpability prior to any form of punishment.\(^5\) His verdict was not in line with Islamic law, since only Haroon’s mother-in-law and his wife were the

\(^5\) In Pakistan, Islam has not only been politicized, but also pseudo-religious misinterpretations are put forward for personal gains. See Appendix for an elaborate discussion of the form of triple talaqs in Islam
only two eyewitnesses of Haroon-Naghmana’s meeting. Baba Siraj Din’s prejudice against the couple was not only apparent from the dismissal of the requirement of four witnesses, but also from the instance that he didn’t even bother to probe the nature of their meeting from these two eyewitnesses. Since the allegation of adultery can only be raised when actual penetration would have been noticed. Again, according to the Shariah law if the allegation is not confirmed, the alleged persons are considered blameless and are not to be punished under the law.

Charged with hatred and prejudice for Naghmana, Baba Siraj Din imposed an obligation on Haroon to divorce Naghmana and that’s the way the divorce was suggested was fully against the spirit of the Shariah. The decision of the village head was utterly unfair, since the fact that Islam does allow a man to marry up to four wives at a time. He did not pay heed to Haroon’s statement that Naghmana was married to him. Above every protest of Haroon, Shahraz narrates Baba’s response:

Right, my son does the honourable thing and divorce Naghmana in the traditional fashion. We are all here as your witness. Give her all three of thalaks…As the village imam and qazi, the judge, I can oversee this matter and I will sign your divorce papers. My two shegirds and practically as you can see the whole village are here as your witnesses. (p. 170)

The interest and keenness of Baba in demanding Haroon to divorce Naghmana was merely capricious and without any justification, since Islam tolerates divorce only as a matter of necessity and strongly discourages it. Baba Siraj Din made an unscrupulous use of his authority in asking Haroon to divorce his wife. Similarly, the public kacheri crippled Naghmana’s reasoning badly. Therefore, when Baba asked her about divorce, she resigned to total silence. The hatred in the eyes of people had terrified her extremely. In his blind hatred, Baba had ignored the fact that
Islam considers the pronouncement of divorce in one sitting as objectionable. In the words of Patel (2003) “the pronouncement of three talks at one sitting has always been called Talaq-i-Bidat by jurists. Talaq-i-Bidat means ‘undesirable innovation’. The very name condemns it as unislamic” (p. 80). In such circumstances, Naghmana was truly degraded in public:

Haroon step up before Naghmana and then in words that sounded alien to everyone’s ears, he divorced his first wife. He rendered her three thalaks, one after the other. Total divorce. Complete severance of any link; no hope of ever getting back together again. The villagers wanted to flee. It was the cruelest, cruelest of all punishments for any woman. ‘I divorce you, rang in everyone’s ears. (p. 172)

Thus, Shahraz represents the way the patriarchal authority of the village played mercilessly in Naghmana’s life and happiness to which the Baba pretended to be a lawful deal. Baba had a conservative mind and succeeded in punishing Naghmana. The kacheri that was summoned for justice rendered her as wretched woman and robbed her of honor and dignity.

4.5 Ancient Promises (2000)

Jaishree Misra in Ancient Promises has given greater consideration to space as an important context for considering the power relationships and cultural perceptions which relate to Janu’s divorce experience. Misra’s detailed description of the structural and ideological features of the different houses and the period of time for which Janu inhabited them reveal the absolute standing of the house in the life of an Indian woman. At the opening of the story, Janu’s reference to Delhi as her house has important connotations:

Home, for virtually all my life, had been Delhi. Big, busy, bustling New Delhi. Two thousand miles away from Kerala, which is about as far as you can go in India, without
tumbling into the Indian Ocean. This I suppose had always been the chief paradox in my life. That these two places ran together in my blood, their different languages and different customs never quite mixing, never really coming together as one. (p. 18)

Janu’s early years of life evolved amidst the contradictory forces of her life in Delhi and the permeation of the Karalite traditions in her parents’ world. Though taught in an Irish convent school what her parents wanted was ‘to speak English well and get a head-start in sophisticated Delhi society’ (p. 18), but they had lived straight forward lives with "strong, deep foundations in the age-old traditions of their ancestral soil and suffered no-mixed up priorities" (p. 26), and expected the same from her daughter. The teenage Janu’s subalternity was aggravated by an awkward combination of modernity (arising from her exposure to modern and liberal lifestyle of Delhi) and tradition (arising from her parents’ ideas of Malayali community. Therefore, Janu’s movement in modern, urban life of Delhi outside the house interrupted the conflict between her desire and duty:

And when, as a Malayali girl growing up in Delhi, with Malayali parents and Delhi friends, and Malayali thoughts, but Delhi ways, I also decided to fall in love with a Delhi boy, who was never really going to be welcome in my Malayali home, I should have been able to look ahead and anticipate the brouhaha to come. But I didn’t, and in the manner of every young girl and the very foolish, I coasted into my troubles without fear of shame. (p. 180)

Thus, Janu’s stepping out of the allotted gendered behavior was taken as an act of transgression from her traditional family who could never allow her daughter to have boyfriends as the ‘reputations of families were carried on the shoulders of their daughters’ (p. 46-47). This is most visible in the incident when a friend of Janu’s father caught her sitting on Arjun’s motorcycle and told him about her meeting with Arjun. Her otherwise loving father was badly shocked that ‘in
blind raging confusion that his little girl had become a woman without anyone bothering to tell him. I heard a swishing sound, and seconds later realized he was slashing at my legs. Once, twice… (p. 48). He could not permit her daughter to any easy romanticisation of the idea of friendship with the opposite sex. As a result, Janu ‘was told from now until my final exams I would be taken to and picked up from school. I would not be allowed to use the telephone and would be accompanied everywhere… It was plain that my parents has lost their desire to send me to college’ (p. 49).

However, these restrictions were trivial compared to the early marriage arranged by her parents. While frustrated by Janu’s improper behavior, her parents arranged marriage for their teenage daughter in the direction of conformity with tradition and patriarchal expectations. Unless Janu was ready to face the chaos of sadness over her lost love, she received a proposal from the Maraar family and was informed, "that they were a highly respected family, had two sons and two daughters, a beautiful house and a fleet of Ambassador cars" (p. 53). Consequently, Janu as a young bride at the age of eighteen left her parents house and went to live with her new husband in a house where Amma, her mother-in-law was in a position of superiority and dominance.

In part two, the major part of the narration focuses on Janu’s married life in the Maraar house. Misra has narrated in detail Janu’s wedding ceremony, identifying the subtle ways in which she was made to act the way society expected her, devoid of her own happiness and will. Through Janu’s painful memories, Misra reveals the social attitude and norms that view marriage as necessary for the protection and safety of female chastity and sexuality. However, negating the cultural assumption, which equates success and happiness in marriage with big houses, on her wedding day when Janu arrived at her new house, the magnificent building of the Maraar house did not make her to feel better. Dressed in her gold bridal sari, when she stepped out of the car conscious of the fact that “all eyes were on me” (p. 7), her first impression of the new Maraar house was one that of terror and disgust:
The house loomed out of the sticky Kerala night, a huge birthday cake in a gloomy, fly infested bakery. With pink borders and roses iced onto white marzipan. Tall wrought iron gates were opened to allow the small convoy of cars up the sweeping drive, past a central cement cup- cake with frilly edges and a grassy mound topped with the plaster-cast figure of a woman. Even the garage nestling up against the side of the house was a pink and white confection that some impatient guest had bitten into….The shivering had started again… That was it, the house that was to be my new home. (p. 6-7)

The process of fitting in the Maraar house began for Janu the moment she entered into the house; she found it “handsome but cold, even on a muggy night like this. No squashed cushions, no scattered toys, just yards of gleaming printed velvet and smooth teak surfaces. Concentrate on your feet now, I hissed inwardly, many eyes will now be observing you observe the house” (p. 9).

The hint dropped by Misra about the linguistic incompatibility between Jnau and Suresh is noticeable for considering the prejudice, which Janu faced in the house of Maraars after her marriage. When Janu first met Suresh in the house of a distant relative, Janu was extremely conscious of the linguistic incompetencebetween them:

I could hear this coy laughter ripple around in anticipation of this hopelessly romantic encounter as we got up and were ushered into an adjoining study. I sat behind the table and Suresh took the chair opposite. He looked like he had done this before. He spoke to me in not–very-good Malayalam, and I replied in not-very-good Malayalam. It could have been an interview for a job, which I suppose in a sense it was. (p. 59)
Janu’s failure to communicate efficiently with her future husband did not disappoint Suresh. As a booming businessperson, however, he particularly wanted to marry a girl who could speak English well. Janu with her strong inclination towards English language was immediately chosen by him with a hope to get assistance for the ‘expansion of his motel business’ (p. 96). The life of Janu’s parents in Delhi was considerably affected because of their Malayali roots. Throughout their stay, their ‘Southey’ linguistic identity put them in a crisis. This sense of linguistic inferiority ingrained in them the belief that learning English language could only save their daughter from those prejudices, which had put them on the periphery of Delhi community. They sent her to an expansive Irish Convent school so to survive Delhi life and “get a head-start in sophisticated Delhi society” (p. 18). Therefore, living and growing up in “Delhi and having to struggle with Hindi in School had relegated Malayalm to a very low priority” (p. 81). Her exposure to Malayalam was limited only to her annual visits to Kerala. During the brief stay over there her ‘holiday –Malayalam’ was always greeted by her grandparents with a comical giggle. However, with her broken Malayalam when Janu entered the Maraars house, she was at a disadvantage for Malayalam was clearly the only language spoken by its dwellers.

From the very beginning, her ‘causal-city-speech’ caused her practical difficulties to develop a substantial relationship with her in-laws. The common assumption among her orthodox in-laws was that people living in Delhi were a disconcerted lot exposed to superficiality and western influences. Whenever Janu tried to communicate with any member of the house in her ‘mix-up brand of English and Malayalam’ it was misconstrued as her pretence of style: “There were times when I longed to break out into animated chatter, joining in the general conversation. But speaking in English would be misconstrued as attempting to be stylish and speaking in Malayalam had on occasion been greeted with sarcastic laughter”(p. 86). She was conscious of all the predetermined ideas that the Maraar family held about her. However, she used to make minimal verbal communications to avoid any embarrassing situation. Clearly, this awkward
realization made her conscious to the point that she could not even comfortably talk to Suresh, which greatly inhibited her chances to develop a happy bond with him.

*Ancient promises* presents the Maraar house as a patriarchal space inhabited by newly married Janu. The restrictions to which Janu was subjected were not merely physical but also psychological. The ways in which her mother-in-law reinforced her subalternity was apparent from the very onset of her entrance into her new house. At every step, she gave her instructions in a commanding voice that she blindly followed. Mrs. Maraar’s selection of Janu “from a family without too much money” (p. 78), was made on the basis that a girl from a frightfully wealthy home might turn out to be arrogant and unable to adjust. Without any love or affection for her new daughter-in-law, she completely controlled her life. On the first morning of her married life, she woke up early when no one seemed to be up. Getting up early was something she only did to get to school and yet the very first words she spoke to a member of the In-laws were, “I usually wake-up early’…oh dear my first words and they’d turned out to be a lie” (p. 83). As in Misra’s words “married girls don’t create a good impression if they stay in their rooms till late” (p. 90). The mother-in-law rebuked her over the use of English.

Misra has shown how misuse of domestic power by the mother-in-law not only oppressed Janu but the way she targeted her parents as well. When her father-in-law politely asked about the breakfast routine of Janu’s parents’ house, Mrs. Maraar sarcastically retorted that “well, you can’t expect any better when women go out to work, can you?” (p. 85) Suresh’s mother never missed any chance to ridicule her. This was another barbed shaft from her. She ridiculed her in front of everyone by targeting her mother who was a schoolteacher. In her arrogance, she believed that jobs were quite simply for the middle people who needed extra money. Misra describes the rules of domination in the domestic politics of the Maraar house through the meal time routine of the family, which was ordered by power and hierarchy, as Janu
observed, “The Maraar clan seemed enormous and the meal routine seemed first in the dining room, children alongside at the kitchen table, then the women, the drivers and servants” (p. 83).

In the final section of the novel, Misra’s narration turns to the role of the joint family in maintaining Janu’s oppression more by the interference of female members of the house than in the male. This is remarkably observable in the case of Janu’s younger sister-in-law, Gouri’s presence on every occasion when the newly wedded couple went out “in the evenings, if Suresh was not touring and did get back early enough, we sometimes went for a drive or to the cinema…. Gauri, my schoolgirl sister-in-law always accompanied us because, as Suresh’s mother said she only had her brother to take her out, poor thing” (p. 88). Gouri’s presence resulted in the lack of privacy between Janu and her husband so that the frankness and true intimacy of a husband and wife never grew out in their relationship. Misra in portraying the character of Janu’s mother-in-law also draws attention to the potential vulnerability of Janu in the sense that the “mother-in-law, who I’d been told to address as Amma was showing few signs of thawing towards me although I did notice that she certainly was not universally icy” (p. 89). While ensnared in a loveless marriage, depending on authoritarian and abusive in-laws, Janu suffered from the lack of belonging and her presence in the Maraar house was riddled with a sense insecurity:

There was, in truth, never anything terrible to suffer in the Maraar household, just a long and constant catalogue of very small things. Too small to complain about. Or write letters about. Now that I was beaten being beaten up day in and day out, that would raise a few eyebrows, I thought. But tiny insults, so small and so subtle as to be almost invisible, could do not do any grave damage, just rob me gradually of my knowledge of myself. (p. 111)
The implications of the feelings of insecurity and lack of belonging turned out to be quite explicit after the birth of her mentally handicapped daughter, Riya. Although, Riya was born in an extremely prosperous family, the Maraar family remained untouched by her disability. Till the time she was three, Janu was exhausted in her efforts to have her appear lovable and be accepted by the Maraars as the reality was gradually dawned on her that Riya was never going to be a Maraar child:

She was never going to provide me with a passport to their love and affection; she did not in fact have one herself. My struggle was over. I grabbed at the realization with a weary but dizzy, almost overwhelming sense of liberation. I was free. I neither had to struggle for their approval any more, nor put Riya through the same hopeless loop…My own rights had not seemed worth fighting for, but Riya needed me to be her voice and a battle on her behalf would be far more satisfying. I was soon going to become the thorn in the Maraar side. (p. 132-133)

Thus, Janu’s coming out of the Maraar house was connected with her maternal power which had a subversive influence over the figure of a submissive and compliant wife which Janu was. Determined to fight for the rights of her daughter, Janu insisted that Riya be educated in, “Special School’ in England since ‘children with learning disabilities were valued in the west. There would be no more awful staring, pitying, aren’t-I-glad-you’re-not-me-looks” (p. 146-147). Riya instilled in her the rebellious spirit of maternal protectiveness to escape the confines of the Maraar house in a desire to protect her mentally handicapped daughter from all the isolation and oppression that she suffered in the Maraar house.
4.6 *Sister of My Heart* (1999)

In *Sister of My Heart*, the domestic location is central to Divakaruni’s spatial arrangement within the plot, whereby the life of that majority of the populace, which is female, was controlled by the territorial politics of patriarchy. Divakaruni’s specific focus on the presentation of domestic space is a reminder for the reader that the space women occupy indelibly impacts their personality and sense of identity. However, it was the ancestral house of the two protagonists that repeatedly makes a concrete appearance in the course of the narration. Sudha and Anju lived with their family in “the white mansion that shone in the late afternoon sun, its brick neatly painted, its marble, polished, its wrought-iron gates topped regally with prancing lions” (p. 37). The subtle elaborations of the house architecture celebrate the ideology of patriarchal boundaries as well:

> It is early evening on our terrace, its bricks over-grown with moss. A time when the sun hangs low on the horizon, half hidden by the *pipal* trees which line our great compound walls all the way down the long driveway to the bolted wrought-iron gates. Our great grandfather had them planted 100 years ago to keep the woman of his house safe from the gaze of strangers. (p. 16)

The focus of Divakaruni’s description of the conscious cordonning off the boundary walls of the old Chaterjee house is not very much of its physical grandeur and magnificence, but more on the complex ideological structures that underlie and organize the domestic space. At one level, the planting of the *pipal* trees consolidated the patriarchal ideology of women to be protected and kept close. At another level, it emphasized the separate worlds of men and women. Indeed, it is against the backdrop of this ‘planted’ code of restricted feminine space and mobility that Divakaruni has followed the central tragedy of the novel.
Moreover, there was no male in the house; the three widowed women of the house held strict conformity to the tradition as their strategy of survival. Concerns about the safety of their daughters made them careful about the potential risks of moving freely in the outside world. Moreover, Gouri Ma’s distressing experiences at the bookstore became the pretext for the restricted mobility of the family. Their intense celebration of personal and private dichotomies was almost invariably the concomitant and outcome of the patriarchal precept of female domesticity. All the social practices, rituals, and ideologies of the house (even in the absence of a male head) emphasized the controlling power of tradition in a space they occupied. Sudha, for example, ironically remembered that from the early years of their lives “we moved in a world of women, my cousin and I, at home and outside…In our house the few men servants did not come up beyond the ground floor. And Singhji, although his deformity seemed to place him in a separate, androgynous zone, never entered the house at all” (p. 65-66). At the time when all the other girls of their age enjoyed the simple pleasures of ordinary life, the complicated rules of feminine spaces, hierarchy and gender bias governed their mobility: “At the few social occasions we attended, weddings or pujas, we sat among our women relatives, webbed around with gossip and song and old tales” (p. 66). While, Sudha never had any problems with their restrictive living, Anju always actively challenged their claustrophobic existence:

Why must Ramur Ma go with us every time we leave the house, even to get the books from the neighbourhood library?” she’d ask. ‘Why can’t we go to Shasmita’s birthday party when all the other girls in the class are going, instead of sending a gift with Singhji? No wonder everyone thinks we are stuck up. (p. 67)

Anju’s outrage over their spatial servility was in sharp contrast to Sudha’s romantic devotion to spatial boundaries. Anju always yearned for the autonomy which they were denied. The best example of this can be seen in Anju’s idea to skip the school and to watch a movie in the cinema,
which didn’t thrill Sudha. She could sense the potential threat carried within the idea. However, she could not refuse Anju especially after she used her familiar emotional tactic “if you were my true sister, you’d come with me” (p. 71).

It was precisely this unfortunate moment that brought sudden chaos in the peaceful life of Sudha. Given the patriarchal context of the narrative space, Sudha’s infringement of the ancestral rule was not without consequences, and was perceived as an issue of sexual transgression. Dressed in gauzy kurtas and with faces painted in bright makeup, the protagonists of the novel went to see the famous movie that had taken the whole city by storm. Anju and Sudha had never been out without having modestly dressed up in saris. Therefore, it was a great shock for Aunt Surita (one of Aunt Nalini’s teatime friends) to catch the two girls in the cinema during the school time. She could not believe her eyes to see them wearing makeup and gaudy kurtas. Not missing her chance to have a “season’s best gossip story” (p. 77), she gripped their arms and instantaneously brought them home: “Our footsteps ring on the cold mosaic floor as we walk in. Shadows dip and swerve against bookshelves like frightened bats, and the portrait of our great-grandfather, painted in the gloomy oils popular in his day, glowers down at us. Beneath the portrait the mothers sit so still on the old velvet sofa that they could have been painted too” (p. 79). Divakaruni’s placement of the three mothers under the portrait of their ‘great grandfather’ is very much suggestive of the presence of his patriarchal notions within the house, as Sudha had known the fact that “as daughters of the Chaterjees, we yearned for knew we could not be. Had our fathers been alive, the mothers might have been more lenient with us. But Gouri Ma’s promise to her dead husband seemed to have frozen our entire household” (p. 67). Thereby, the security guaranteed by the physical structure of the house in the course of the narration is contrasted with the patriarchal authority of Aunt. Nalini who reprimanded her daughter for making all of “Calcutta talking about their escapade’ and for smearing ‘blackest kali on our faces” (p. 79), and thus restricted her to the confines of the house. Sudha, along with her cousin -
Anju, defied the boundaries of the house and were both punished and rejected for doing so. As a daughter of the house, Sudha’s transgression of the physical boundaries of the house was taken as a gesture of disobedience to her filial duty. Stepping out of the house in an innocent effort “to know the world” (Diakaruni 1999, p. 67), was not merely a physical act, as it was for Sudha’s cousin, Anju, but a transgression of ancestral ethos that drove Sudha out. Sudha’s story like Janu in *Ancient Promises* is a reminder that the price of defiance has been often eviction and marriage.

Sudha was not only enclosed within the domestic setting, but was also restricted to make decisions about her own life. In order to safeguard the honour of her daughter, Aunt Nailini destroyed Sudha’s dream of college education. After her school graduation, Aunt Nailini made every possible to get a suitable match for her daughter as soon as possible. The proposal of Ashok Gosh was arrogantly rejected on the pretext of his supposed inferior caste. Meanwhile, when the proposal of Mrs. Sanayal’s son (a highly placed official in the Indian Railway) came; it was immediately accepted without seeking Sudha’s consent. However, passionately in love with him, Sudha could not accept Anju’s idea of runaway marriage and silently resigned to Ramesh’s proposal. Divakaruni explains the limitations of Sudha’s choice to enter into an arrange marriage, how her submission to her mother’s decision depended on the happiness of her cousin; Anju who was deeply in love with Sunil and the fact that “Sunil’s father will never let him marry a girl whose cousin eloped with a man she met in a cinema” (1999, p. 141). Divakaruni has also concentrated on minute details of the wedding preparations within the house, especially the day when the two cousins entered into arranged marriages as brides. In keeping with the popular Indian perception of daughters as guests in their parent’s house, Sudha and Anju on their wedding day had a similar experience. While wandering through the wedding day chaos in the house: “the way people—even the servants we had known all our lives—watched us with awe and a certain respectful formality, as though we had been transformed by our bridal status into anointed beings” (p. 154-155).
In analyzing the idea of gendered spaces and the way power structures operate within Indian marriages, Divakaruni in the second section of the novel presents the pressures that Sudha had to take in her marital house. As a responsible and subservient daughter-in-law who was “always first to wake” (p. 187), her husband’s house to lacked freedom and privacy in her married life. Divakaruni presents the exploitation of Sudha as implicitly rooted in the domestic space, which she shared with her ever-demanding mother-in-law. The hierarchy of the power in Bradhman house is neatly illustrated by Sudha telling about the agenda of her mother-in-law as “Control, that was what she wanted, to make us dangle from her hands like puppets” (p. 217). Therefore, even a single ‘glance’ of her predatory mother-in-law worked on Ramesh, like a “nail on a car tyre” (p. 217), who ordered hundreds of men around every day, seemed to shrink before her. She cleverly manipulated Sudha by delegating her responsibilities of all the tiring jobs of the household while keeping finances under her own control, as Sudha reflected during her stay “now I am the keeper of the household, its many cupboards and pantries, trunks and storerooms. All except the double-locked steel Godrej safe which holds the money and the wedding jewellery. Those keys are still kept by my mother-in-law. I do not mind. I have enough responsibilities” (p. 189). Throughout, Sudha’s married life turned out to be somewhat restricted in action and space. This is strikingly evident, for instance, in Sudha’s account of her appointment with a lady-doctor in Calcutta. When her mother came to know about her expected visit, they made a call to Ramesh and requested him for Sudha’s extended stay over their place to which he agreed to her mother’s utter dismay, as “she would have liked to finish my check up, get the mandatory visit to the mothers over as quickly as possible and take me back to Bradhman-her territory the same day” (p. 216).

Clearly, for Sudha it was only her body’s ability to procreate that was crucial to secure her place in the house of marriage. Divakaruni draws attention to the vulnerability that Sudha faced during the time she was a childless woman. She had to listen the taunts of her mother-in-
law and relatives, had to visit temples and shrines, and taken to every other gynaecologist of the city and out of the city in order to get the baby. On her visit to Goddess Shashti’s shrine in Belapur, Sudha had nothing but the sense of desperation when “pray, Natun Bau’, says my mother-in-law. ‘Pray to the goddess for a son’. She is still holding on to my wrist. Her nails bite my flesh, and her lips move feverishly all the way to the shrine of the goddess of childbirth” (p. 233). Ironically, to the despair of Sudha when “the test showed that it was a girl, my mother-in-law said the eldest child of Sanayal family has to be male—that is how it’s been for the last five generations. She said it’s not fitting, it will bring family shame and ill-luck” (p. 259).

For Sudha, motherhood was riddled with the sense of insecurity as it failed to confer her with the desired spacing when she was found to be pregnant with a baby girl. An awareness of the power that the mother-in-law had on her son, Sudha knew that even though Ramesh had no issue with the sex of the baby, she could not expect any help from him. She told Anju that, “mother-in-law has made the appointment for the abortion already. She is not telling me when. If I do not go of my own will, she’ll find some other way of getting me there. Maybe she’ll drag me, who knows. She’s capable of anything, once she makes up her mind” (p. 260). Consequently, the only option left to her was to escape the house of marriage and returned to Calcutta like a “stranger in the house where I was born. And like a stranger, I am not sure of my welcome” (p. 26).

4.7 Conclusion

Within the novels under study, women novelists highlight the ways in which restricted feminised spaces constitutes oppression for a female, while simultaneously becoming the site of exclusion and stability, gender discrimination and oppression. The ideology which postcolonial women novelists aim to expose through the memories of parental and marital houses of their protagonists, is that hegemonic discourses of appropriate female behaviour and marriage establish
and normalize parameters of femininity and the mandates of marriage and motherhood. The patriarchal space of the house determines marriage and motherhood as the primary determiners of a female spatial stability across social classes. A woman has to contend with the demands of marriage and problems of adjusting into conjugal families. They are expected to hold unquestioned obedience towards their husbands, and where applicable juggle the demands of paid and unpaid services in the house of marriage. While criticizing the house as a patriarchal institution within the selected narratives, not only do the protagonists relate their personal experiences but also implicitly reveal how these spaces help reinforce divorce as a prime failure of a woman within the postcolonial world. To the extent that these statuses are considered normal and essential aspects of customary womanhood, divorce serves to limit and destabilize women’s lives.
CHAPTER 5

REPRESENTATION OF THE SUBALTERN: DIVORCE, DISLOCATION, AND DEATH

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter with its extensive devotion to the image of the house directs attention to the context within which the identity of a woman is subject to particular disciplinary forces and discursive pressures. House though serves as a metaphor of oppression; however, the tragic endings of all the five novels preclude the identification of the expulsion from the house of marriage as an instance of liberation or improvement of conditions. The sense of loss and oppression experienced by women implies divorce as a part of a wider process of subordination, illustrating most concisely and dramatically that even when divorce is the result of social conditions, when it poses challenge to her sexuality or to the life of children, the woman is held to be at fault or blamed. Divorce encapsulates subalternity for a female divorcee, whereas the void created in the life of a male divorcee is immediately filled by his remarriage. Without sufficient support or resources, for a female the end of marriage is not concluded as an instance of radical improvement in her life. In this chapter, the focus of the study is to examine the narrative closures of the selected novels with a particular focus on the way power relations are played out on the female protagonists so as to conclude that divorced women are oppressed in the absence of ideologically inscribed markers of belonging and social conditions that surround the institution of divorce.
5.2 *The God of Small Things* (1997)

That night in the lodge, Ammu sat up in the strange bed in the strange room in the strange town. She didn’t know where she was, she recognized nothing around her. Only her fear was familiar. The faraway man inside her began to shout. This time the steely fist never loosened its grip. Shadows gathered like bats in the steep hollows near her collarbone. (Roy 1997, p. 161)

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has worked with the issue of dislocation as a noticeable sign of Ammu’s persistent oppression – which she faced after her divorce. As mentioned earlier in chapter three of the study, following a complex narrative pattern, Roy feels no obligation to conclude Ammu’s tragedy at the end of her narration. The tragedy of Ammu’s divorce is dispersed throughout the whole text- in terms of the overt physical, emotional, social and religious dislocations that she encountered at various points in life after her divorce. What is striking about Roy’s narration is that first comes the episode of Ammu’s cremation. According to Christianity, Ammu was restricted to marry only a Christian male. Therefore, Ammu’s act of marrying a Bengali Hindu was taken as a serious religious offence, which had not only disrupted her communal identity, but also resulted in the denial of burial services by the church after her death. Regardless of Ammu’s marriage to a Hindu, she did not convert her faith and remained a Christian. However, the church refused to arrange her burial ceremony on religious grounds. The chief reason behind the church’s denial was her transgression of the communal codes. Therefore, Chacko hired the van to carry her dead body to the electric crematorium. What was most unfortunate that only Rahel and Chackoo attended her funeral ceremony. They silently watched when her body was sent into the oven, none of them had cried:

Then Rahel’s Ammu was fed to it. Her hair, her skin, and her smile. Her voice. The way she used to love her children before putting them to bed; We be
of one blood, ye and I. Her good night kiss. The way she held their faces steady with one hand (squashed-cheeked, fish-mouthed) while she parted and combed their hair with the other. The way she held her knickers out for Rahel to climb into. Left leg, right leg. All this was fed to the beast and it was satisfied. (p. 77)

This situation had a number of causes and a number of consequences. Ammu’s death occurred in the course of her search to get a job for her survival after her expulsion from the family house at a young age of thirty-one by her brother Chacko. He held her twin children, Estha and Rahel as directly responsible for the death of her little daughter, Sophie Mol. On her visit to the Ayemenem house with her English mother, Sophie Mol had drowned in a small river near the house while playing with her cousins. Clearly, Chacko’s denial of reality that happened and his confrontation with Ammu in her room, where she had hidden herself along with her twin children overlapped with the ideologies and politics of legal and material circumstances within which the Ayemenem house operated. Ammu’s marginality and displacement can be read as a consequence of her ‘poor Locust Stand I’ (p. 57) that denied her the right to inherit the family fortune, which had its roots in the legal discrimination of Syrian-Christian system. In addition to revealing the ways in which legal and religious values coerced Ammu into a position of powerlessness, the text also shares a strong component of patriarchal ideology that promoted the belief of a daughter’s education as an unnecessary expenditure –that it did not make sense to spend on a daughter who had to be married off daughter. Ammu’s father, Pappachi as an orthodox patriarch believed that it was Ammu’s responsibility to work in the house, and that she didn’t need an education after her marriage. Therefore, the financial constraints that Ammu faced after her divorce could not be handled as she didn’t have the suitable learning to get a reasonable job.

Roy has pointed out the ways in which patriarchal ideologies of motherhood problematized Ammu’s capacities to resist her subalternity after her divorce. This was
particularly because of the unresponsive attitude of Ammu’s ex-husband towards the children that increased her financial desperation. Ammu did not get any financial assistance from her ex-husband to raise the children. The avoidance of their father added complexities in the life of Ammu while staying in the Ayemenem house. Most noticeably, the deprivation and discrimination, which Ammu’s children faced at the hands of different family members of the house, makes Ammu’s marginality overtly detectable. Ammu was weak within her own family. There were diverse occasions when her children encountered fear and subjugation, which made her tearful and restless:

Ammu loved her children (of-course), but their wide-eyed vulnerability, and their willingness to love people who really didn’t really love, exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them – just as an education, a protection... Ammu watched over them fiercely. Her watchfulness stretched her, made her taut and tense. She was quick to reprimand her children, but even quicker to take offence on their behalf. (p. 43)

They were never accorded the status of family members. Of all the family members, Baby Kochamma was especially intolerant towards their presence in the house and never missed the chance to reprimand and remind them of their hybrid breeding so she had always “ grudged them their moments of high happiness, when a dragonfly they’d caught, lifted a small stone of their palms with its legs, or when they had the permission to bathe the pigs, or they found an egg –hot from a hen”(p. 46). She always envied the comfort they get in each other’s company. This is vividly exemplified in the events leading to Sophie Mol’s death and funeral. Sophie Mol’s death was purely accidental as the boat capsized in the river, which the three kids were riding during their secret expedition to catch fish in a river near the History house. Though, Estha and Rahel were guiltless, Baby Kochamma cleverly manipulated them to confess in front of the police that it was Valutha who murdered Sophie Mol. Valutha died in police custody and later it was sorted out
that the children had gone on their own, police was troubled with the death of an innocent man on account of Baby Kochamma’s FIR against Valutha. When Ammu found out the whole situation, she went to the police station to protest against the injustice, she was silenced by Inspector Mathew. The narrative takes up the futility of Ammu’s protest at the police station as an instance of the failure of a subaltern’s protest, since in the words of Inspector Mathew “the Kottayam Police didn’t take statements from *veshayas* or their illegitimate children” (p. 8). The language that he used threw Ammu out on the margins of the law. She was discredited for her status as a divorcee and was ridiculed in front of her young children. Baby Kochamma set up the situation against Ammu as “it was her idea that Ammu be made to pack her bags and leave and Estha be Returned”, and that “Chacko breaking down doors was only the sad bull thrashing at the end of Baby Kochamma’s leash” (p. 322).

Indeed, the emotional vulnerability that Ammu suffered with the death of Valutha had combined with the repressive socioeconomic realities of her life, which turned her displaced and disempowered. Ammu’s desperation to get her children back in her life and hopelessness to get a job put her health to the tight claps of asthma. A glimpse of Ammu’s physical and emotional vulnerability is actualized from Rahel’s sad reminiscences of her mother’s last visit to Ayemenem house when Estha and Rahel were nearly eleven, but only Rahel was at home. Ammu “came back to Ayemenem with asthma and a rattle in her chest that sounded like a faraway man shouting. Estha had never seen her like that. Wild. Sick. Sad” (p. 159). Ammu talked frenziedly, as if talking would hide the reality that she was dying. It was her last meeting with Rahel, who saw her again after her death. Roy emphasizes Ammu’s dilemma by contrasting it with the image of a small sparrow that died inside Pappchi’s blue Plymouth, parked outside in the verandah. Roy seems to highlight the futility of Ammu’s desire and struggle to have her own space by invoking the plight of a small sparrow:
A sparrow lay dead in the back seat. She had found her way in through a hole in the windscreen, tempted by some seat-sponge for her nest. She never found her way out. No one noticed her panicked car-window appeals. She died on the back seat, with her legs in the air. Like a joke. (p. 29)

The death of the sparrow echoes the institutionalization of Ammu. Here, Roy offers a sharp critique of women’s resistance to the patriarchal norms, as well invokes the way in which Indian families oppresses their female members through socially determined roles which deny and ignore their individual needs. The story of Ammu’s divorce is only dramatic because it happened, as Chanda notes, “in a country where race, religion or caste can decide the course of a love affair, where it can take as much raw courage to choose a husband, or leave him, as to face a firing squad” (p. 209). It is against this background of a patriarchal society that Roy portrays the old Ayemenem house as the key site in the exertion of patriarchal ideology towards its divorced characters, Ammu and her twin children, Rahel and Estha. Ammu had no material resources to fight the injustices of the society and to have a ‘house’ of her own. This is what Rahel remembered her sharing the dream of having a house one day: “We’ll have our own house’, Ammu said… ‘And in our school, we’ll have classrooms and blackboards,” Esther said.‘And chalk.’“And Real Teachers teaching.” “And proper punishments,” Rahel said” (p. 98).

Roy’s narration shows that the subalternity of divorce women lies not exclusively in their divorce experience, but is embedded in other social situations and practices which divorce disrupts and dismantles. Baby Kochamma’s words stand closer to the social reality, as Ammu’s destiny, in a grimy Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, can be read as a marginalized space, where “she died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for the company, and no Estha to lie at the back of her and talk to her. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age” (p. 161). Rahel’s painful reminiscence performs an extensive interrogation of the tragic features of
dislocation that Ammu faced after the death of Sophie Mol, which consequently demolished every possibility to resist her oppression. Thus, Ammu’s death becomes a logical consequence in a society where in the words of Ammu’s aunt Baby Kochamma a woman’s place in the society was only through her husband. Ammu’s death exposes the fragility of a subaltern’s resistance, contesting the idea of divorce as empowering alternative for a distressed woman in a postcolonial world.

5.3 My Feudal Lord (1994)

Allah Says in the Holy Quran:

Prohibited to you (for marriage) are: your mothers, daughters, sisters, father's sisters, mother's sisters, brother's daughters, sister's daughters, foster-mothers (who gave you suck), foster-sisters, your wives' mothers, your step-daughters under your guardianship born of your wives to whom ye have gone in, no prohibition if ye have not gone in; (those who have been) wives of your sons proceeding from your loins, and two sisters in wedlock at one and the same time except for what is past; for Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful. (4: 23)

An important feature of Durrani’s fictional representation of her marital crisis is the misinterpretation and violation of Islamic laws that operates within Pakistani families to get their control over the lives of the wives and daughters of the house. Thus, it has a range of consequences-from the oppression that Tehmina faced while keeping the sanctity of her marriage for thirteen years of her life, with the lack of support, children and space in her life when she challenged her husband’s illegal relationship with her younger sister. The narrator reports, “this is incest, God. You have forbidden a man to have a relationship with two sisters at the same time”
Under those distraught circumstances, she tried to take the help of her whole family, particularly her mother in order to save her marriage, but nothing worked. Tehmina criticizes the hypocrisy of her family by saying, “our family, full of intrigue and deception, backbiting and backstabbing, was a micro-cosm of Pakistani society. The rule was simple: do whatever you want to do, just blanket it” (p. 345). Instead of catching the culprits, her husband’s prohibited affair limited Tehmina’s chances to stay in the house of marriage. Patriarchal norms that required her total submission and dependence on her husband made Tehmina vulnerable to divorce:

The next morning Mustafa arrived to sign the divorce papers. He disgusted me by calling all our children into the room. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he said very intensely, ‘I want you, my children, to bear witness that I don’t want your mother to leave. I want her to be my wife. I love her. But she wants to leave me.’ I thought with a smile on my face: what a great actor you are, Mustafa. He signed the papers and handed them to me as the children cried and pleaded with me not to break up our home. My face remained expressionless, my eyes dry, as I signed. (p. 364)

Tehmina’s oppression did not end with the end of her marriage. Despite the fact that the problems she faced after her divorce were perhaps more intense than the other four divorcees of the study, however, she was the woman who actively resisted her subalternity. The medium she uses to express her resistance-writing -is, in the words of the feminist sociologist Rasida Patel “exclusively male in our culture” (p. 27). By appropriating this medium, Tehmina decided to write this novel and broke the normative culture of ‘traditional silence’. The content of the novel was so disturbing to Pakistani publishers that they refused to publish her work. Eventually, when

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6 This clearly indicates that, in accordance with the teachings of Quran, the wife has the right to demand divorce and to file a suit for the dissolution of marriage in case of her husbands illegal relationship with her sister. See the section “Creation of prohibited relation” of the Appendix for the constraints of adultry on conjugal relationships under Muslim Personal law.
published in 1994 it created great upheaval in Pakistan and was immediately banned. Despite being banned, the book enjoyed a wide circulation and was translated into many languages. In breaking the tradition of silence that shrouded the most traditional social institution in Pakistani life—the marriage—Tehmina ventured into a forbidden territory: the private, sexual, political, and religious. Rebelling against this ideology, she rejected the institution of wifehood and questioned the traditions that sanction it. Tehmina has not only pronounced her resistance to the society in terms of breaking her silence and raising her resistance by exposing the prejudices of the society, but also sets forth an analytical demonstration of the way her divorce rendered her marginal. The assertion of the ‘subalternity’ of Tehmina as a divorcée gets materialized with her realization of “the position that a woman falls into after her divorce” (p. 372).

In stark contrast to Mustafa Khar’s bold announcement of his seventh marriage, My Feudal Lord ends with Tehmina’s position as a subaltern female who lost her house, identity, parents and kids as a direct consequence of divorce decision. The ending of My Feudal Lord can be thematically summed up in one line of the novel where Tehmina in moments of extreme desperation acknowledges the truth behind her mother’s words that “a broken marriage was a reflection of woman’s failure”(p. 279). This shows the paramount importance of the cultural context for understanding Tehmina’s subalternity. Tehmina’s words explain her predicament when she vacalizes the reality of her marriage to Mustafa Khar that, “our marriage was sustained not by the relationship, but by complicated eternal forces; my ego, fear of failure in the eyes of my family and society, fear of losing my children, fear of losing my status as a married woman” (p.168 -169).

One of the immediate problems that she faced with her stepping out of her marital house was the problem of location. Despite being the daughter of an affluent family, she could not go back to her parent’s house. Like her childhood, Tehmina even in her most desperate moments of
her life failed to get the support of her mother. Tehmina becomes a recluse and exiled by her own society. She was led to believe that it was all her fault, especially when Adila (the favourite, light-skinned daughter) was the reason behind her breakup. Tehmina’s dysfunctional family is symbolic of her society as a whole. As a microcosm of society, the family reveals the prejudices, norms, power hierarchies and inner dynamics of the Pakistani society. The reciprocal relationship between the family and the society implies that the ills of the one are mirrored in the other, and vice versa. Although the mother's behavior has to be understood in the context of a patriarchal culture that forced her into a loveless marriage, she was not merely a passive victim. Her abusive behaviour towards her daughter was a voluntary choice. After all, when she wanted to defend Adila’s adulterous actions, she did not hesitate to violate the rules of patriarchal society. This depicts the Pakistani family as a dysfunctional unit fraught with conflicts and as a central site of female oppression. They demonstrate how established cultural values reinforce her way into the structure of family life and control every aspect of it, including the mother-daughter relationship. Frequently, this key family relationship is not only exploitative, but also downright abusive. At every single stage of Tehmina’s life, her mother remained a hostile figure, unloving, unkind, and unsympathetic to her. Worse yet, Tehmina’s mother had been an obstacle to her daughter's self-development, condemning her quest for independence from troubled relationship, and demanding conformity to custom and convention. Tehmina writes that despite the fact that her mother had divorced her first husband, she never saw divorce as a solution to marital distress but always viewed divorce as a woman’s fault. The daughter couldn’t hold her contempt, pity, and rage towards her dominant mother.

The narrative closure also projects the inner turmoil of the lonely, Tehmina, who was disturbed by a sense of futility. Living in the society where marriage is thought to be an essential part of women’s life, the status to strive for, Tehmina experienced her breakup with ambivalence. Although her first reaction was that of relief, “a great burden lifted from my shoulders. I was no
longer Tehmina Khar” (p. 364). However, she suffered a serious drop in her life after her divorce, which can be summarized in her own words when she questions Mustafa after her divorce, “do you realize that you have taken away everything from me-thirteen years, my family, my children, my youth and everything I believed in? I have to start anew” (p. 373). As Kirk and Rey state that the majority of divorced men “marry within a year after the end of their previous relationship, often marrying women younger than themselves. Women wait longer, and fewer do” (p. 170). This is particularly observable in the case of Mustafa, whose life remained undisturbed by the divorce as he remarried seventh time, to a ‘twenty-two–year-old divorcee whom he had known only a month” (p. 372). Whereas, divorce left Tehmina totally depraved: “I found myself falling deeper into the hell of betrayal, injustice, poverty and anguish. My desolation became so frightening that I reached a point of numbness. There was no present and no future-only the past, which invaded and enveloped my whole being” (p. 358). It was this consciousness realization of the social disapproval that bound her to an oppressive relationship with Mustafa Khar. During the fourteen years of her married life, Mustafa kept on black mailing her of serious consequences in case if she ever thought of the breakup. She recollects his blackmailing on one particular when she demanded divorce in the following words:

If you ever mention leaving again, I will not spare you. This is not the atmosphere that I can afford in my home. I have growing daughters. Do you understand? I shall fling acid on your face. I’ll maim you and take my children away from you. I can deprive you of your beauty like-he snapped his fingers in an arrogant fashion ‘-this’. (p. 189)

What Tehmina intends to relay through his threats after she had been divorced from Mustafa is to reveal the reality of his intimidation. A close study of the concluding part of the novel in relation to the texture and theme of the novel justifies the above observation. Ever since her marital dissolution, Tehmina’s narrative reveals the injustices and oppressions that she suffered because of her troubled identity as a divorcée. The stigma of divorce is passionately exposed in Tehmina’s
statement where she commented, “marriage maybe purgatory in our society but divorce is hell” (p. 35). Alone in her house—a house associated with many painful memories, social alienation was not the only effect of divorce. She was all the time haunted by the memories of children, and so were the kids. Living with their father, the absence of their mother had created a great vacuum in their lives. However, not content with separating them forcefully from her, Mustafa also placed “impossible restrictions upon our time together. When the children were visiting me in my home, a guard stood outside the gate, preventing any visitor from entering. One of the Mustafa’s maids was delegated to remain with us at all times to report our conversation” (p. 370).

The concluding part of *My Feudal Lord* concerning Tehmina’s predilection for breaking the tradition of silence needs elaborate analysis as it suggests her challenge to patriarchal power. The women’s submissive internalization of their destiny is a symbol of their acceptance of patriarchal norms and social values. In her case the problems had manifested themselves in the form of character assassination, alienation from her family and friends, failure to retain the custody of her children along with a severe financial crisis. The reason Kirk and Rey (2001) give for the vulnerable status of a divorced female is that women as a group earn less than men as a group. Within such a context, it becomes particularly difficult for a woman to leave a violent marriage or relationship if she is financially dependant on her partner. Tehmina says: “I rethought my life, trying to define my reality. I was no longer Mrs Mustafa Khar. I had been discarded and spat out like sugar-cane chaff. He had done everything he could to destroy me and he had very nearly succeeded” (p. 374). Mary Daly (1979) in Gyn/Ecology takes a similar line seeing the marginality of the divorced women as an attempt to eliminate all those women who lived outside the control of the patriarchal family and who by so doing, presented the eccentric, and challenging option of self-centred existence. Even after divorce, Tehmina lived with a painful memory of the numerous anxious moments of her past life. It was particularly a disturbing phase of her life when she confided her children about her decision to get divorce:
I held a long and painful discussion with my children, explaining the situation to them as best as I could... They cried tears of desolation when I told them of my decision, and I knew it would take them much time to understand. I also knew that I would never be satisfied until they, as well as I, escaped from the prison that was Mustafa. (p. 357)

Towards the end of the narration, Tehmina presents herself as subaltern. Living all alone, except for the company of the servants who remained loyal to her, she was left alone by her family and friends, “I was homeless, destitute, and scared. Even as I tried to rise from my crawling position, Mustafa maneuvered himself into further prominence and power” (p. 365). She became a woman with no personal identity, but one that was dependent on her status as a wife, daughter or mother. Divorce destabilized all these markers of the identity and left her confused about her identity: “But if I was not Mrs. Mustafa Khar, who was I? The Tehmina Durrani of my childhood was alien to me, a confused little girl whom I had outgrown. I could not relate to her. Was there a new Tehmina Durrani inside me, older and sadder, but also wiser?”(p. 374) This confusion effectively conveys Tehmina’s situation. She concluded her life after divorce was a lonely struggle against the odds of society, realizing the truth of the saying that “it is easier to wash dishes in your husband than in the world outside was turning truer” (p. 326). This suggests that as divorce dissolves a marriage, so too it disturbs a way of life once thought stable, as she felt: “I shuddered at the realization of the position that a woman falls into after divorce... Increasingly I understood why women dare not break away. Increasingly, I experienced a humiliating lack of confidence and self-esteem... This was the difference between man and woman” (p. 37). However, this pain ultimately became a channel for resistance that enabled her to raise her protest by publishing her novel, to become free individual and to have an identity and a purpose in life.

Her writing becomes a desperate protest against the society whose norms and values had kept her in bondage and stifled all her hopes and ambitions. She concludes her fiction with the
statement: “I was determined not to waste thirteen years of my life. I decided to cast a stone at hypocrisy. I decided to write this book and break the traditional silence” (p. 375). Though Tehmina lost her stability and happiness in the process of her struggle with patriarchal forces, her life had nonetheless become meaningful by virtue of the fact that she chose a cause, and tried to combat her subalternity. Therefore, this dissolution of one reality opened up other possibilities. Thus, the experience of divorce widened the imaginative possibilities for Tehmina, and her adaptation of the theme of divorce into the romance of My Feudal Lord is one result.

5.4 Typhoon (2003)

The ending of Typhoon demonstrates the predicament of a woman whose marital breakup was the product of the patriarchal values and taboos –which determined her behaviour as immoral and abnormal, as was apparent from Jahanghir’s icy response over her wife’s past: “What were you doing in his arms, if you weren’t a whore” (p. 335). Despite having a passionate love for his wife, Naghmana’s husband also blamed her to have shown improper sexual behaviour. Once again, the village Chiraghpur had turned her into a ‘doomed woman’ with no personal or social agency. More than any other selected novelist, through the ending of Typhoon Shahraz claims that the subalternity of a divorced woman is perpetuated by space and that place matters. The cultural ideology that regards women as dependants, to be sheltered and kept close, has been a continuing centrality in the representation and construction of Naghmana’s oppression.

Divided into four parts of unequal length, the final part of the novel narrates multiple endings for the different characters of the novel. The complexity of narrative closure of Typhoon is comparable to opening of the novel in which Shahraz opens her story with the scene of Baba Siraj Din’s haveli, which became the focal meeting point of all the important characters of the novel. This complex closure of the novel is clearest in Shahraz’s interest to symbolize the patriarchal values and conventions that take marriage and female chastity as the sole basis of
happiness in a woman’s life. Other than Naghmana’s return to the village, Haroon and Gulshan also returned to the village after twenty years. Before the critique of the last chapter of the novel where the divorced protagonist put an end to her life as the only option left for her, the more positivistic ends of Haroon and Gulshan’s reconciliation becomes the phenomenon of cultural ideology where location is central to the institution of marriage, rather than personal relations. They too left the village after village kacheri. It is here in this part of the novel, an idea of their unhappy married life is revealed that lost all its vibrancy the moment Haroon publicly divorced Naghmana in the village kacheri, under the pressure of Gulshan’s mother. Gulshan’s visit to her mother’s house, however, is suggestive of her return to the happy life that she once had before she spotted her husband in another woman’s arm. The couple made confessions to each other the way their married life was burdened by their estrangement, when they cleared their positions they became the happy lot again. Gulshan’s return to the house becomes the location of memory and identity, indicative of the role house plays in the stability of marriage. The happiness and peace of her married life disappeared after the day of village kacheri. However, she never thought of divorce as an option. Subsequently, her stay within the marital house saved her marriage. Whereas, Naghmana’s return became her return to the past that once again heralded dislocation in her life and again worked to her disadvantage.

The occasion of the funeral ceremony of the village head with everyone visiting the haveli of Baba Siraj Din to pay their last respects to the dead man is suggestive of their reverence for the patriarchal social order. Baba Siraj Din was one of the characters whose hatred and intolerance for Naghmana’s modern appearance catapulted her subalternity. Therefore, the call from the ‘village buzergh’ suggests that Naghmana’s subalternity stretches both backwards and forwards: not only in her familiar nightmares where she was always surrounded and stung by the cobras but also towards its horrifying conclusion, which is anticipated by Naghmana’s fearful realization that now after twenty years “this time she had to face her husband’s kacheri” (p. 27). After
attending the funeral ceremony of Baba Siraj Din, Naghmana could not resist her urge and ran towards the place where once the village *kacheri* was held. The rusty iron gates and plastered walls of the *kacheri* brought before her eyes the painful memories of the most unfortunate incident of her life. Through the close juxtaposition of Naghmana’s obsessive remembrance of the past and her visit to the village *kacheri*, Shahraz is able to develop the novel’s fundamental concern, the delayed effect of the damaging incident on Naghmana’s relationship with her second husband, Professor jee. Naghmana confided him with her secret pain that she had kept hidden from him during twenty years of their married life:

‘I came here on a holiday,’ she continued, unaware of her husband’s wooden presence beside the pillar. ‘My aunt slapped me! One woman standing on the rooftop of her house hit me with her shoe. The old man who summoned us here to ask me for forgiveness…he hated me! He had me divorce from my Haroon. It was there I sat’. Naghmana pointed to the place. ‘Haroon sat there! And, she his second wife, sat there with her son-gaping at me! They were all gaping at me! All hating me. The old man forced my husband to divorce me-three times. Not once, not twice, but three times! The cobra demanded three *thalaks*! He took my beloved Haroon from me. (p. 334)

However, what highlights her tragedy was her husband’s response, ‘I see’ a tight response. He had missed nothing, and heard everything, “So you are afraid of your husband’s memories. Are they still so powerful, that you go into panic?” (p. 255) The cold look in his eyes made her once again realize her that now she had also lost him. He blamed her that if she was not whore what she was doing with him in the middle of the night. This painful realization marked the end of happiness in her life as “he was no longer her beloved professor. Bitterly it dawned on her, that it was now her husband’s *kacheri* she was attending. Not the old man’s. Now Jahangir was the judge”(p. 335). Frantically, Naghmana ran to the village cemetery, which suggests numerous things. Her observation of different graves suggests the presence of power hierarchy even after
one’s death. Even among dead, Baba’s grave like the man stood dignified. Here, Shahraz details the way Naghmana looked around and noticed different things, but her looking was powerless and that she broke her silence but the dead could not hear her. Naghmana’s shouts at the freshly petalled grave of the village head was nothing more than the speech of a subaltern, which is not heard at all:

‘You evil man!’ The harsh words startled small sparrow hopping lightly on Zulaikha’s headstone. ‘You wrenched me from the arms of my first beloved husband. Now you called me back to your evil village to rob me of my second. He has left me—do you hear have lost my beloved Jahangir! May you rot in hell!’ she hissed down to the village’s most revered Buzurgh, her tears falling on the fistful of the soil. (p. 34)

Her hysteric shouts and the emotional trauma became the evidence of the social conviction where Shahraz makes one of her characters to declare divorce as a ‘cruelest of the punishment for a woman’, which stands true in Naghmana’s position after her divorce. The explanation of Naghmana’s dilemma becomes explicit in Shahraz’s use of snake imagery. Shahraz makes use of dreams as a literal device in more subtle manners to describe symbolically and artistically the stinging nature of the cultural norms and traditions. Her nightmares were the crucial turning points in her neurotic status, revealing many conflicting tendencies within her. Staring at the empty space, Naghmana heard a car engine start up from far away, she felt as if “snakes were still watching, sliding steadily towards her with their long, sleek bodies, their beady eyes, dark green and menacing—their flickering tongues taunting her with their venom of hate. Closer and closer they crept” (p. 336). In one of her dreams:

I too am haunted by that day. I have had the nightmares for the past twenty years, in which there are lots of snakes and cobra. They are always after me—chasing me, taunting
me. Many a night I have woken up screaming and found myself covered with sweat. I cannot talk about it with my husband. He knows nothing about that day. It is my terrible secret. I hope to take it with me to my grave. (p. 296)

Because of their frightening nature, Naghmana remembered her recurring dreams with their minute descriptions. Those nightmares had frightened her throughout her life after the divorce. Therefore, her death can be taken in terms of societal demands. Naghmana’s suicide was one of despair. When she found her husband’s black car meandering through the fields before disappearing from sight ‘He has gone away! Her heart and eyes cried out in disbelief, “He has left me! My professor has abandoned me!” (p. 336).

Typhoon ends with Naghmana’s suicide in the village well, the place where she first met Haroon. Her drowning in the well suggests both her submission and resistance to the cultural context within which Shahraz has placed her: Chiraghpur society’s rigid ideas of spatial restrictions, which exploited women of the society and elevated men to the position of dominance and authority in the processes of unequal social relations. The need for observing the boundaries of the house with intrinsic gender discrimination lead to the transformation of Naghmana into a subaltern. She was denied the right to speak to Haroon before the village kacheri, and thus, her inability to speak enforced her position as a subaltern. As Shahraz writes:

Her blurred eyes were fixed on the dark surface of the water, twenty-five feet below. The shimmering mysterious pool smiled up at her and beckoned. She smiled back. At peace with herself. The shadow grew nearer and nearer and then met the welcoming dark surface. The laughing mouth widened happily, gargling and rippling, before smoothing back into the place again. Content, it resumed its sleep. (p. 343)
Her act of drowning suggests that she regained control of her life, which had been in the hands of other people. Her death by drowning suggests the failure of the subaltern to transform her life. It was only before her suicide at the end of the novel, when Naghmana decried her treatment in the village cemetery which remained unheard: “he was my husband, Jahangir! She shouted to the wind. The two startled crows stopped their playful pecking, nearly loosing their grip on the branch, and too stared down at the bent figure of the woman, who was peering into the deep cavern of the well” (p. 342). Her desperate speech offers a paradigm of subaltern’s voice, which is not heard when raised. Revealing the shocking secrets to her husband about her past shows how powerless she was to stand up to her beloved husband and to defend herself, as “before her dazed hurt eyes she saw her beloved husband stride out of the courtyard” (p. 335).

5.5 *Ancient Promises* (2000)

From the opening of the novel, Misra’s narration, which has remained slow to the point of attending to the minute details of the circumstances which put Janu on the way to break her marital commitments, speeds up towards the end of the story. Instead of drifting the narration into pointless excavations, Misra works with typical themes to announce the subaltern subject position of her female protagonist after divorce: “Fear, yes. Wavering Confidence, Flagging Self-Esteem, Gnawing Self-Doubt….. all those little demons with fancy double-barreled names had raised their heads at some point or the other, clouding my belief in my own worth” (p. 250).

Jaishree Misra in *Ancient Promises* has recognized conflicting social agencies involved in Janu’s oppression after her divorce. Misra has not merely worked with the idea of divorce as socially undesirable or with the ideology that marriage is sacred and irrevocable; nevertheless, the great disparity between the positions of Janu and Suresh after divorce also comes to the forefront in order to present the divorce as a feminist issue. Long before their marriage was legally terminated at a Family Court in Cochin, the whole of *Malayee* society was taken by the news of
Suressh’s second marriage. Jose, the taxi driver who came to pick Janu at Cochin airport informed her with the details of his marriage, as “everyone knows it, chichi. She is the daughter of a businessman in Quilon, twenty-seven, spinster” (p. 298). In a place like Kerala, which was forever struck by a ‘famine of bridegroom’ the news of Suressh’s second marriage was something quite predictable to Janu for “men never had much trouble finding a second spouse. It was only divorced women who seemed to get stuck with one-eyed widowers who had a brood of noisy children to bring up” (p.204). Surely, Suressh with his ‘string of Maraar Motels’ and ‘fleet of ambassador cars’ ( p. 53), had all the exceptional qualifications which made him the most desired candidate even second time in the Malayee marriage market. The void created in Suressh’s life by Janu’s escapade was momentary like the bubble on the surface of water and was instantly replaced by another woman. Suressh who was equally responsible, if not more, comfortably slid back to his normal life. The announcement of Suressh’s remarriage at the peak of his marital conflict serves as a critique of the double standards held by the society where men loose neither reputations nor any chance of starting anew after divorce.

In strong contrast to the ease with which Suressh was reported to have retrieved to the normal life, Janu’s life turned worst after divorce. It was believed to be Janu’s mistake of not making the ‘holy union’ last. This native prejudice carried the chief paradox of Janu’s life. The “stubborn Delhi tag” which exhausted all her efforts to fit in Maraar family did not disappear after her divorce. She was sarcastically labelled as a“Bombay-Delhi city type” ( p. 66) in her home town. The humiliation which Janu suffered in her married life and after divorce has a great deal to do with the fact of her growing up in the modern Delhi society which thoroughly alienated her from the conventional lifestyle in Kerala. The opening chapters of the novel are particularly suggestive of the great disparity which exists between Delhi and Malayan lifestyle. The economic and political growth of Delhi city had made women aware of their rights and less dependent on men. Most specifically the busy life of Delhi was readily accepting the nuclear family system.
Compared to Delhi, where marriages were perceived more as a matter of personal happiness and convenience, in Kerala the traditional joint family system with its strong preference for the practice of arranged marriages mostly made divorce as an urban phenomenon in Alleppey. Marriages in Kerala were never been a private affair but were alliances, “alliances between just whom was the bit that wasn’t always easy to work out. The parents? Families? Whole clans reaching back many ghostly generations?” (p. 22). Staying married was the most crucial norm in the Karalite society as has been exposed by the novelist in the course of her narration. In its reverence for the family life, Misra holds that the burden to preserve the sanctity of the institution was put solely on women of the society. Janu’s aunt, Suma chichi gives a classic example of this necessity of social conformity for a woman. The poor woman had to “put up with her beatings about twice a month, turning up at family functions looking tired and defeated, but married” (p.238). In the phallocentric society of Kerala where male complacency was taken as central to every marriage, the denial of marriage was a taboo. Thus, within the hometown of Janu’s ancestors, which was claimed to be the ‘Venice of the East’ in tourist brochures was in fact a place ‘stuck in a time-wrap’ divorce “was to many women a fate worse than death” (p. 144). Consequently, the modernity of Delhi life was perceived to be responsible for Janu’s rebellion. Janu’s brief annual trips to Kerala during annual school vacations before her marriage were thought to leave her alien to the cultural values of Kerala.

Therefore, the general response of people after Janu’s divorce reveals the orthodox social ethos as “the arrogance of modern girls…couldn’t care less about the child, and a handicapped child, mind….they could have had the pick of any girl but went for this Delhi one, tch, tch, tch…”(p. 251) to “escape the marriage that wasn’t a terribly bad one” (p. 170). The lawyer’s wife-Kamala articulated the conventional reaction to divorce:

All these Delhi girls with their Delhi ideas of divorce, corrupting our Kerala ways.
Unable to adjust, huh? Send them all to me for a crash course on how to be model wives.
I will teach them how to worship the ground their husbands walk on, how to keep immaculate houses, how to cook Chinese Chili Chicken and how not to have jumped –up ideas of jobs and careers. The trouble with these girls is that they think they are above it all. Arrogance that’s what I call it! (p. 250)

Kamala while rebuffing Janu’s explanations as illogical becomes a mouthpiece of patriarchal ideology according to which a married woman has to submit and surrender before her husband’s wish in any case. Kamala, the lawyer’s wife was the first one to know about Janu’s split with Suresh. She was a close friend of Manju Pillai, who lived next to Ammumma’s house in Alappay. Therefore, before Janu and Ma had returned to the town, she confided Pillai with all the details of Janu’s shameful return on a phone. At first whispers started about Janu’s involvement in an extra-marital affair with a sprinkling of razor-sharp words “aimed to string and stab:…adulteress….shameless…promiscuous…materialistichussy”(p.251).It was this forthcoming threat of public humiliation that made Janu’s mother to cry for weeks. When Janu returned to Alappay and told her about the decision to leave the Maraar clan: “my mother took to her bed with the shock of it…the few times that I went in to see her, she was lying on her back, staring sightlessly at the ceiling, tears rolling silently down the sides of her face” (Misra 2000, p. 213).

However, with the passage of time the social interference and disdain kept on exacerbating. They were not just Malayalis or the urbane and educated people of Delhi who blamed her, but the children also played their part by sending free “missiles of sticks and stones” (p. 252) on the mango trees, windows and the rooftop of the house.

The society not only rejected her, but also destabilized the life of her widowed mother and old Grandmother. It was extremely difficult for them to withstand the opposition so the three women (Janu, Ma and Ammumma) altogether stopped stepping out of the house to avoid the frenzy of activity and name-calling. In indispensable situations like collecting the rent or to pay utility bills, only Janu’s mother took the risk to go out “but came rushing back as soon as she

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could, sometimes looking pale and tearful” (p. 252). The most heartening was a letter sent by Raghu Uncle and his wife Shobha Aunty who lived in Delhi. Despite living in the city, they too were strongly critical of Janu’s decision and announced their complete severance of any future relationship with them. The intention behind the social boycott was to make Janu suffer as a punishment for her reckless conduct. The worst thing that she suffered was that Padmaja Maraar (Suresh’s mother) for a week stayed in Valapadu with Riya to show all her relatives and acquaintances that Janu just wanted to escape the responsibility of her handicapped daughter. Misra in articulating Janu’s fears and frustrations appears to criticize the society that only held Janu culpable of the whole affair. Misra’s narration avoids any idea of ease in Janu’s life after divorce as she says “technically this would be no different from my years with Maraars, but in the eyes of many people I was (let it be whispered) a divorsee with a child. A tainted woman, a woman with a past” (p. 304).

_Ancient Promises_ largely elaborates Janu’s memories of her arranged marriage, however the narrative does not conflate her oppression with the arranged marriage syndrome. Misra has created couples (like Janu’s parents and her uncle Ramuma and his wife Vijimami) from arranged marriages living together harmoniously. What follows at the end of the narration is a passage where Misra makes her protagonist to vocalize, “it wasn’t the arranged marriage system for sure. I’d seen enough arranged marriages metamorphose into good marriages to know” (p. 299). The comment about arranged marriage suggests that it is not within Misra’s agenda to blame the marriages which are arranged by the family, nor that Janu was denied the choice to marry the man she loved. Janu didn’t fathom love marriage as during her stay she had seen people “with all the freedom to choose their own life-partners, make almighty messes of their marriages” (p. 299). Marriage in Kerala was a social obligation and an alliance between the two families, therefore a woman with immaculate social vigilance is always good at maintaining this relationship. In the words of Janu:
A good upbringing was really a terribly unhelpful thing for a girl in Kerala. How much better if parents taught their daughters the arts of feminine wiles to keep their husbands interested, and also taught them to transform themselves into clever accountants whenever the situation demanded a quick look into husband’s bank account. (p. 199)

At the age of eighteen, Janu as a young bride lacked the social maturity which could have helped her to adjust in her newly married life. Janu did sacrifice her personal happiness for the sake of her family and society. Unfortunately, her life in Delhi did not teach her the ways with which she could have successfully fit herself into the Maraar family. The age disparity between Janu and Suresh never let the true intimacy to develop in their relationship. Janu lamented “for my mother having omitted to teach me how to cook; for not being able to speak Malayalam elegantly; for having been brought up in Delhi; for having had an aunt who in the nineteen-twenties, had an affair that everyone in Kerala (except me) had heard about” (p. 97). Hence, for Janu there were a number of factors behind her marital failure. Most ironically, the kind of formal education, which Janu received in her early years, did not benefit her married. Her parents put her in an Irish Convent school, which could not instill in her the virtues that were necessary to qualify as an ideal wife. Therefore, with her ‘Englishy style’ she became the target of her mother-in-law’s verbal assaults who perceived her a threat to their traditional setup. Therefore, being unfamiliar with the customs, values and ways of her in-laws, she was left to survive only on the periphery of the Maraar world.

Towards the end of the novel, the contemplative narrative shifts to the actual scene in the courtroom. The small, congested courtroom was filled with people who had empty expressions on their faces. Every one present there was conscious of the social boycott that they had to face once they would step out of that room. Misra with her reference to the section 13b of Hindu Marriage Act 1955 under which Janu had filed for the “Petition for Dissolution of Marriage by Mutual Consent” (p. 298), criticizes the unvarnished fact that the patriarchal mindsets don’t correspond
with the legislative ease of divorce. Did it leave her better equipped for whatever would come next? Most specifically, the questions which started stifling Janu’s mind the moment the judge of the Family Court in Cochin nodded to indicate that the ten-years of her troubled partnership was legally over, Janu’s extreme emotional vulnerability is revealed in the questions which she asks herself, “how much of that was my fault? Some of it? All of it?” (p. 299). As Janu made the journey towards Alleppey, she was gripped by feelings of guilt and mental distress. Although, she tried to convince herself of Riya’s disability as a blessing to escape the loop of enforced happiness, but no matter how hard she tried, she could not dispel the gloom out of her soul. The fear to live among her people without the protection of any male was so strong that when Janu returned from England, her journey back to home was only occupied by Kerala’s ‘most efficient grapevines’ that she knew would immediately spread the news of her return to Alleppey within no time. Janu in her deviance of the social norm badly feared the social censure as all the way she remained preoccupied with the thought that “whether the grapevine was still trembling excitedly about me these days, or had it found some fresh fodder and moved on to somebody else?” (p. 298). The end of Misra’s narration with Janu’s bus journey in the mid of night is suggestive of the darkness which Janu had to combat in her life as a tainted woman.

5.6  *Sister of My Heart* (1999)

In 1998 the Indian Association for Women’s Studies reports that 10,000 female fetuses are killed every year in India. The editorial of a national daily puts the annual figure at 50,000 female fetuses (*Times of India*, August 6 1994). Yet another study has determined that from 1978 to 1983, 78,000 female fetuses were reported killed, or 13,000 female fetuses annually were aborted, following the use of amniocentesis as a sex determination.

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7 It is clear that while Misra is uncomfortable over the social conservatisim regarding the divorce issue, her reference to the 13b clause of Hindu Marriage Act reveals her acknowledgement of the legislative practices which donot foreclose the possibility of a female resistance to marital subjection. For the details of the clause see Apendix.
test. These conflicting statistics indicate that this violence has become the undetectable crime against women and at the same time, the estimated numbers indicate the proportion of a genocide. (Bhatnagar, Dube & Dube 2005, p. 2)

It is in response to this traditional son-preference crisis in Indian society that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni negotiates the divorce experience of Sudha in *Sister of My Heart*. The narrative closure of *Sister of My Heart* signals to the wifely devaluation and the practice of female infanticide in Indian society. Divakaruni explicitly criticizes the ethos of female infanticide when her protagonist Anju says, “I know about the abortion of girl babies. Every once in a while there is a story about it in *India West*. And last month *60 Minutes* had featured the abortion clinics that have sprung up all over India, now that amino tests are so easily available” (p. 260). Her italicized reference to *India West* (a leading international newspaper which reports the news and issues of South Asian part of the world) and *60 Minutes* (one the greatest international TV shows featuring investigative reports on different social, political, religious, geographical and communal issues from all around the world), highlights the authorial emphasis on the presence and actuality of this evil practice in India. With the spread of ultrasound technology in the 1980s and 90s, great number of private clinics mushroomed everywhere in India. Unfortunately, instead of using this test for the right purposes the charlatans in these private clinics used it for the abortion of female fetus. Regardless of the widespread misuse of this technology, the Indian government did not take any significant measure to combat this situation. It was only in 1994, when under the pressure of the fierce protests by different women’s organizations that the government passed the law to ban the use of administering the prenatal tests for the purpose of abortion. However, the legislation of three years imprisonment and nominal amount of fine passed by the government offered little to stop the violence against the female gender.
As a conventional suffering mother, Sudha suffered physical, social, psychological and emotional vulnerability because she failed to produce a son. There were no laws, institutions or custom that could offer Sudha protection from the violence visited on her due to son-preference. Sudha was an obedient wife and a dutiful daughter-in-law but the unjust demand of her mother-in-law severely limited her chances of marital stability. The crisis began in Sudha’s married life with the birth of female fetus in her womb. She had to make the crucial decision of sacrificing her marital life in order to protect the life inside her womb. It was at the very outset of Sudha’s pregnancy when her mother told her mother-in-law about the detection of genetic disorder in many newborn kids within their family. She requested her to arrange a screening test for Sudha in order to prevent any future inconvenience. All the love and caring which pregnancy brought in Sudha’s married life was for her as “the carrier of the new heir of the Sannayals” (p. 247). She was married into a family where for the last five generations the first-born was a male child. Her mother-in-law lamented over the blown away family pride when the test showed that it was a female. Regardless of his deep love for Sudha, Ramesh could not protect her from the clutches of his domineering mother. All his efforts proved futile to convince his mother as she insisted, “it’s not fitting. It will bring the family shame and ill-luck” (p. 259). Despite the fact that Sudha followed all the social norms and lived up to the cultural expectations, she left the security of wifehood without any hesitation and turned out of the doors of her marital house to save the life of her daughter. Her act of leaving the marital house was her strong resistance of the stability of patriarchal social structures that rested on a wife’s unquestioned submission. She revolted against the social rules with this scornful realization as, “What good it has done any of us, a whole lifetime of being afraid of what society might think? I spit on this society which says it’s fine to kill a baby girl in her mother’s womb, but wrong for the mother to run away to save her child” (p. 268).
During her first encounter with the outside world, Sudha experienced extreme social harassment. Sudha’s journey from a devoted wife and daughter-in-law who held the honour of the family, to the polluted outcast who turned out of doors by her married family was full of pain and desperation. She was mocked and jeered at by the male passengers in the train for travelling alone and without any baggage. Train travel is a social space in postcolonial India, where class hostilities are expressed, where violence on women passengers is an ever-present threat. Driven to madness by the circumstances surrounding her journey back to Calcutta; Sudha was unnerved and intimidated to the point that she thought of returning to her husband’s house and to succumb before her mother-in-law’s decision. Sudha’s insights into the peripheral presence of a single woman in public space is profoundly revealing of the social ideology and system:

And the men-the station is full of men. They brush against me with a purpose ,they spit out wads of betel leaf near my feet and bare their teeth in a grin when I jump away, their bold, leering eyes travel over my body-a woman alone is fair game, after all-as they wonder why I have no baggage. Why no one has come to meet me. There is a sinking feeling inside me. Is this, too, something I will have to get used to? For a moment I am tempted to climb back on the train and return to the seeming safety of the big brick house in Bardhaman. (p. 264)

This passage, strongly self-justificatory helps to illustrate Divakaruni’s suggestion of the way a divorced woman’s subalternity is dispersed throughout the patriarchal structures of power. As an effect Divakaruni seems to suggest that divorce is not a merely a breakup of personal relationship for a woman, but one that risks the safety of personal space. Sudha’s encounter with the society without the privileged protection of a male had such a debilitating effect on her that she thought of a safer option, “If I return at once and go through with the scheduled abortion, she will consider my foolish act of rebellion forgotten” (p. 267). Although, Sudha was conscious of the risks involved in travelling alone. However, the verbal and sexual harassment that actually faced
during her train journey made her extremely painful. She felt desecrated by the constant staring of men on the station. All her life she had never travelled alone. Before her marriage, she never went out of the house without Ramur Ma- one of the old servants in her parents house and after marriage, either Ramesh or the driver escorted her where she went. It was considered culturally inappropriate for a young woman to travel alone. Most specifically her experience of hiring a taxi sharpened her feel for the deforming effect of the absence of male protection in her life. Stuck in the crowd, she was touched, stared and heard nasty comments. More to the verbal harassment, her kurta button was ripped open, worst of all “someone else whose face I cannot see in the crowd takes advantage of the melee to grope at my breast” (p. 264). Sudha’s experience of travelling back to Calcutta was a signifier of cultural response towards a single woman as a sexual prey.

While the experience of the outside world was an innocuous matter for Sudha, however, she was aware of this unmitigated social response. Unsure of the reaction of her family members, most importantly, she feared to be put down by the family for taking up such a long journey alone. She felt awkward “like a stranger in the house where I was born. And like a stranger, I am not sure of my welcome” (p. 265). Most challenging for Sudha, was the resistance shown by her mother, who strongly disapproved her divorce decision, which made her emotionally vulnerable. In her call to Anju, Sudha told her about the split with her mother:

Just before I called you, I called Calcutta. Mother picked up the phone. When I told her, she said I must not leave, absolutely not. My place is with my in-laws, for better or worse. She’s afraid they’ll never take me back, and then what would happen to me? Everyone will think they threw me out because I did something bad. They’ll think my baby is a bastard.’ Her voice breaks on the last word. (p. 261)
Her attitude reflected the typical social belief of a woman’s place in her husband’s house. She remained ostentatiously critical and disapproving so that when Sudha returned, she rounded on her: “I told her to grit her teeth and put up with it, and try for another pregnancy. A woman can have many children, after all, but a husband is forever. But no madam had to do it her own way. Now what will we tell our relatives? Uff, she’s smeared kali forever on Chatterjee family” (p. 266). She worried more about the shame that Sudha’s return would create them with her daughter’s predicament. Sudha’s life was saved from further humiliation only after the interference of Pishi and Gouri Ma. Although, the two women knew the price of living alone in the society, instead they supported her with all their resources in her crisis time and encouraged her to fight like the Rani of Jhansi.

Immediately after the divorce, Ramesh remarried. The wedding card was sent to abuse Sudha for she could not give birth to a male heir: “I could hear her voice between the beautifully looped gold characters on it taunting me. See how easily you can be replaced, see what a catch my son is, see what an enormous mistake you made, leaving him” (p. 326). Even after divorce, Sudha remained subject to the taunts of Ramesh’s mother. The cultural dismissal of divorce as a respectable choice for a woman was not at all lost on Sudha, “when the final divorce papers were delivered to me from the court, I looked at the wax seal, colored an ironic sindur-red... This was the final disgrace for a woman, the final failure. That’s what I had been brought up believing” (p. 279).

The reappearance of Ashok in the deserted life of Sudha was taken by everyone as a hope of a happy future. According to Pishi, “He truly is a fine man. Not many girls get a second chance like this” (p. 292). Pishi’s reference to the second chance signaled the devaluation of a divorced woman in the marriage market. Sudha’s oppression was reinforced when Ashok put a condition before marriage, “while I don’t care about your previous marriage’, Ashok looks away
as he speaks, ‘I don’t think I can welcome your daughter as fully as she deserves” (p. 285). Ashok’s explicit act of rejection narrativized his prejudice against Sudha’s daughter. Thus, Ashok’s setting of a condition before marriage served as a fine instance of psychosocial commodification of women in Indian patriarchy. Despite his steadfast admiration, Ashok’s insensitivity towards her daughter reflects the strong cultural exploitation of a divorced woman is a reflection of the conventional attitude of an Indian male, whose ego could not allow to a marry a woman with child, as the child reminds of the woman’s past relation to another man. To refuse his proposal, Sudha also suffered pain:

After I said no to Ashok, how painful time dragged its crippled body along. The desire to be gone built like steam inside my heart until I was ready to explode. Faster, faster. I chafed until the giant ferries wheel of the days finally picked up speed and became a mad blur of shopping-packing-tickets-passports-inoculations…What I am leaving behind –I cannot articulate what it is, but I know I will not find it, ever, in America. The mothers kiss me, their lips damp and cool on my forehead, that childhood smell of Binaca toothpaste, and I wish I had not been in such a hurry to go. (p. 323-324)

In response to Sudha’s categorical refusal to accept Ashok’s condition, her three mothers compellingly requested her to rethink her decision of marrying Ashok. They related their own life experiences and the role that the absence of male security had played in their lives. By narrating the experiences and difficulties of widowhood, Divakaruni suggests the vulnerability of a typical Indian woman after she loses her husband. The mothers made utmost efforts to convince her to marry Ashok, as Pishi said:

‘It’s not as if we are trying to get rid of you, my dear’, Pishi adds. ‘You know how much we love you. But we have learned, all three of us, how hard it is to live out your days without a man. Unfortunately the world has not much changed that much since we lost
our husbands. At least, people were sympathetic to us because we were widows’, says my mother. (p. 293)

Divakaruni points out the subalternity of her young divorcee by the Indian society, by making her protagonist to move to the west. America became Sudha’s only hope to live a respectable life in terms of the move away from her position of a subaltern divorcee. Pulling herself back from the brink of despair, her decision to go to America thus became an effort to escape the confines of her subaltern position. Instead of succumbing to control of society, she said:

America has its own problems…but at-least it would give me the advantage of anonymity. No one would care that I was a daughter of Chaterjees, or that I was divorced. I could design a new life, earn my own living, give Dayita everything she needed. Best of all no one would look down on her, for America was full of mothers like me, who had decided that living alone was better than living with the wrong man. (p. 294)

Sudha’s concerns suggest Divakaruni’s thesis on the issue of a woman’s divorce and its aftermaths. Unlike Janu whose journey to England thrived on hope, though sitting in the plane the “plush maroon walls and shiny fixtures and air hostesses with lacquered smiles” did fascinate Sudha, however, she was conscious of the challenges of “her new life in a new land” (p. 340). In Ancient Promises, Janu’s contentment had to do with her chances of remarrying Arjun, whereas for in Sudha’s case there was no such prospect as “going with the knowledge that this will not be a fairy tale-journey” (p. 316).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Sister of My Heart ends with her female protagonist, Sudha’s journey to America. Sudha in her subversion of the patriarchal rule of total surrender to the husband’s will, moved to America with her little daughter after it became impossible for her to live happily and independently among her own people. Her journey reflects Divakaruni’s
concern about the invasion and disruption of stability, which divorce typically creates for a female living in a society with its patrilocal arrangements. Divakaruni mediates Sudha’s ambivalence towards her divorce in her narration of the myth of *Queen of Swords* to her little daughter who could hardly understand what her mother told her. Divakaruni sarcastically brings up the image of the *Queen of swords* to suggest the dejection and desperation of Sudha. The tragic myth of the *Queen of Swords* figuratively sums up the plight of Sudha’s subalternity:

I tell her how the queen of swords was born an ordinary girl, I tell of her marriage and pregnancy, of how the palace guards tried to destroy the girl baby in her womb. How the unborn daughter gave her mother the courage to leave and the flaming swords made of light so that none dared prevent her from going. I tell her of queen’s desperation after her baby was born, when no one dared to give them refuge. How she wondered in many lands with her daughter, until finally she found herself at the ocean’s edge, with nowhere to go. The queen and her daughter climbed onto the back of the bird, and the bird began to carry them to a new life in a new land. (p. 340-341).

While narrating the story of the *Queen of Swords*, Sudha seemed to justify her stepping out of the house of marriage as an effect of the social configurations of power that drove her to make a desperate choice in her life. Consequently, when she was denied the space outside marriage, she took her daughter and moved to the ‘new land’. This new land for Divakaruni’s heroine was the world of America. Sudha knew that life among strangers in a strange land would not be easy for her, but she was confident of the fact that at least nobody there would bother about her marital disgrace.

### 5.7 Conclusion

Using death, dislocation and travel to the west as the alternative fate of their divorced female protagonists, the selected women novelists have stressed the limits of patriarchy on the
lives of divorced women; who cannot escape their subalternity within the space of patriarchal territory. Divorce only severs their relationship with the husbands and their families. The end of marriage does not end problems in the life of a woman. No matter what becomes the reason for the dissolution marriage, a woman after divorce remains at a disadvantage. Therefore, divorce is not inherently problematic in itself, but within the situations, conditions and relations these characters divorce make it a subject only spoken of in whispers. The analysis of narrative closures, particularly point out divorce as an act of resistance against patriarchal power and do not see their subalternity as static and monolithic, nor does it deny them agency. Divorce allows for the possibility that hegemonic power can be challenged, while recognizing the interconnected nature of both gains and constraints.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the study concludes the ways in which the selected novels have looked at the debilitating processes of gender politics together with questions of the subjectivity of divorced women and speaks against the specific impasse that postcolonial women face while experiencing divorce. Each of the five novelists in this study reveals a pervasive patriarchal bias with regard to the idea of divorce and the identity of a divorced woman. Not only these novels have conceptualized the social and cultural perceptions of divorce, but also the practices, emotional expressions and attitudes that form the life experiences of divorced female protagonists and, ultimately, the identities that are shaped in and through the patriarchal ideologies that surround the institution of divorce. By focusing on the diverse experiences of subaltern women, the most significant contribution in the context of the present study has been the motivation to bring the divorce experience of women into postcolonial spotlight.

To examine the representation of divorce in the postcolonial fiction, this study has been guided by Gayatri Spivak’s contention of the double colonization of postcolonial ‘gendered subaltern’ which has generated interest in the experiences of postcolonial women who have been marginalized or completely absent in the dominant postcolonial and feminist discourses. The concept of patriarchy is central to Spivak’s theorization of gendered subaltern-a critique of ideological system that privileges the male and puts women in a subordinate position within postcolonial society.
The extended investigation of the formal dimension of the selected novels has strikingly identified the strong preference for the use of realist modality by women novelists. From the identification of this realist impulse, the present study concludes two main arguments. First, in terms of the representational neglect of the full possibilities of studying divorce as an important fictional theme, this study claims that the adaptation of realist modality by the women novelists in the narration of their stories has its major role to play. The idea of prescriptive and regulative use of literary texts in dominant postcolonial studies has fostered an aversion for realism and has resulted in the preference for a particular kind of literary texts that fulfill the criteria of ‘modernist ethos’ (that is experimental, ironic, open-ended and inter-textual narration) while excluding or marginalizing texts which don’t show these traits in any foregrounded manner and are treated as conventional and outmoded. One of the considerable results of the dominance of ‘modernist ethos’ in postcolonial literary circles has been the creation of a hierarchy in which magical realism, associated with the subversion and critique of imperialism occupies the top, while the novels written in the realist manner (most commonly by women novelists) occupy lower ties.

Divorce, then cast as a domestic theme with its material consequences has often been considered more appropriate to realism than the metaphysical concerns of magical realism. Consequently, the neglect of divorce theme in postcolonial studies is submitted as a lingering bias against realist narrative conventions fostered by the influential postcolonial theorists who have shown an aversion towards the use of realist narration as a part of the imperial tradition that allegedly fixates the identities of colonized people. This study, however, claims that the selected novels with their overt use of realist conventions are very much the narratives of resistance. As an instance of tactical use of their autonomies-female protagonists reject the institution of marriage while refusing to compromise their sexual respectability (as in the case of Ammu and Naghma), life and welfare of their children (like Janu and Sudha), or protesting the double standards of sexuality (like Tehmina) even when it mean cultural, social and physical constraints.
All these texts narrate numerous occasions where Ammu, Tehmina, Janu, Sudha and Naghmana resisted their oppression and actively rebelled against their marginal status. The decision to demand divorce in a patriarchal society is itself an evidence of their resistance. Divorce suggests their immense audacity, especially when they knew that their overt rebellion of patriarchal values would carry severe consequences, i.e. familial alienation, social exclusion, displacement, and financial constraints. Strategically, the use of realist modality is complicit and indispensable form for the subject of divorce in its domestic, material, and cultural consequences. Its use has enabled the women novelists to develop a discourse round the coordinates of space and history within the postcolonial context. The choice of divorce in itself allows for the possibility that hegemonic power may be challenged and freedom won, while realizing the interrelated nature of both victories and ongoing constrictions.

Second, the preferred use of realist narration in the formation of divorce discourse accentuates a poetics of relatedness—that is a correspondence between the sequence of events and conditions under which divorce occurs is precisely the point of the women novelists. The general style of composition in these novels is seen to be that of retrospection and anticipation out of which appears linear (as in Ancient Promises, Sister of My Heart and My Feudal Lord), circular (as in Typhoon) or fragmented (as in The God of Small Things) narrative structures which posit the assumption of strict gender ideology as the determining cause of the subalternity of divorced women and in so doing, relate an order of incidents that together generate the experience of divorce. The radical inclusion of socio-historical insights and temporal frameworks readily allow the reader to interact with specific cultural contexts of an Indian/Pakistani society within which a woman’s autonomy is stifled by conventional ideologies and institutions. The main thrust of the compositional forms of these narratives is on the exposition of the matrices of identity that shape the divorce experience of a female.
The study with its focus on subalternity as an effect of discourse, points out that the selected narratives have for the most part been attentive to the interrogation of the factors and forces under which and by means of which, female figures were left with no other choice in their married lives other than divorce. All the studied female protagonists had diverse encounters with divorce and all of them faced different problems in their lives. However, all the five narratives structure the processes of divorce in comparable ways, which result in the identification of a number of recurring features. Central to these narratives are the subjective experiences of the female protagonists who belong to the middle class of the society, with the exception of Tehmina in *My Feudal Lord (1994)* who is the representative of the elite class and comes from an influential political family. Apparently, the narrations in these novels seem to digress or deviate from the actual issue of the divorce. They recapitulate the spatial regimes where the female protagonists faced gendered restrictions. This helps in establishing their oppression as intertwined with their ethnic, racial, social, geographical and religious identities. It implies their subjection to strict limitations over their behaviours and restrictions on the spaces they occupy. Whether, these restrictions are tied up with the ideologies of a female’s responsibility to protect and preserve her sexuality (as in *The God of Small Things*); or the noticeable cultural inclination for mothering sons (as in *Sister of My Heart*); or the cultural codes governing a woman’s dress, appearance and spatial boundaries (as in *Typhoon*); or the double moral standard of wifely chastity and permissiveness of sexual exploits to the husband (as in *My Feudal Lord*); or the explicit patriarchal entrapment of a married woman (as in *Ancient Promises*): the social order of the selected novels centers round the permanence of the patriarchal family system which typically rests on women’s conformity with conventional gendered ideologies. Their detailed descriptions of the family lives, wedding arrangements, ceremonies and functions along with the conventional ideologies of sexual respectability and female domesticity suggest that within dominant postcolonial discourse marriage functions as a central component of familial institution. The social necessity of marriage for women promotes ideals of premarital chastity, wifely devotion,
self-sacrifice, service and sexual propriety which serve as a mechanism to control women’s sexualities within the institution of marriage. Consequently, the idea of a woman’s divorce is shown to be unacceptable and stigmatized.

All these novels negate the idea of divorce as a free choice for a woman living in a postcolonial society; a perception that is echoed in both the narrative and thematic levels of the selected novels. Thereafter, instead of focusing more on the issues that female protagonists face after their marital breakups, the selected narratives have for the most part exposed those complex mechanisms of traditional disciplinary boundaries which undercut the possibility for a female to resist control over her marriage matters. All these protagonists were faced with either/or situation and had no third way to save their marriages. Indeed, for them to escape from the house of marriage was not an active choice, rather predetermined by the social and cultural constraints.

These narratives set before the reader the question of the solidity of a woman’s autonomy who demands divorce. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Sister of My Heart* (2000), is contextualized in the famous Indian city, Calcutta. It is narrated in linear order mainly through the perspectives of two cousins, Anju and Sudha. While Anju is characterized as strong and rebellious in spirit, Sudha is portrayed as a traditional, submissive and dependent young woman. The plot of the novel lingers on the illustration of family traditions, domestic and gendered ideologies that contributed to Sudha’s tragedy. Divakaruni’s novel primarily targets the patriarchal structures of motherhood, which influenced devastatingly on Sudha’s agency of choice. Sudha’s impregnation with a baby girl was seen as a failure in her prime role as a woman to provide a male heir to her husband. Her decision to continue her pregnancy caused her much personal distress. It was only after the potential threat of an abortion planned by her mother-in-law that Sudha ran away from her husband’s house. Sudha’s refusal was perceived as a challenge to the authority of her mother-in-law who was desperate to preserve the male line of her family, with the consequence that she
got her divorce papers without any delay. Sudha’s divorce throws a challenge to the ideals of the society which in Divakaruni’s words considers it acceptable to kill a baby girl in her mother’s womb, but unacceptable for a mother to save the life of her daughter. This exhibits that living under the patriarchal rule which prefers a male child over a baby daughter, Sudha could have continued with the marital bliss by producing a male heir.

Jaishree Misra’s Ancient Promises (2000), situates the textual terrain of Delhi (which is the capital of India) and Kerala. The story opens with the end of Janu’s marriage. Afterwards, the narration proceeds in a chronological sequence to the nostalgic remembrance of her past. She reminisces her childhood, years of unhappy married life along with the retrospection of her in-laws continued interference in her married life. The painful memories of her life after she gave birth to a handicapped daughter reveals the ultimate reason behind her divorce. Similar to Sister of My Heart (1999), in Ancient promises (2000), Janu’s divorce is in an indirect way intertwined with the oppressive ideology of mothering sons. Although she did not face any explicit reprisals at the birth of her baby daughter the way Sudha did, however, her presence in the Maraar house was estranged with the insanity of her daughter. It was total indifference and alienation of her husband and his family towards the child that Janu tentatively decided to file for the divorce.

The plot of Tehmina Durrani’s My Feudal Lord (1994) is set in different cities of Pakistan (most specifically in Lahore, Multan and Karachi) and is interspersed with the details of the political turmoil of the 1980’s in Pakistan, the influence of which reverberated on the personal life of Tehmina. Durrani’s novel portrays the Pakistani society’s transition from colonial past to democratic present and the effect of this shift on Tehmina’s personal life. As the story is told from Tehmina’s perspective and focuses on her feelings, thoughts and experiences, however, the narration is frequently interspersed with the gendered disadvantages faced by Pakistani women in the wake of socio-political turmoil and developments of the time wherein her story is set. This
concern with the constraining effect of the power structures over the actions of a postcolonial woman is most explicitly targeted in Tehmina Durrani’s *My Feudal Lord*. Durrani has actually shown Tehmina’s choice to divorce being determined by the confrontational turn of her married life. This moment of confrontation came in Tehmina’s married life with the discovery of Mustafa’s illicit sexual involvement with her younger sister, which raised serious moral, social and religious objections. Being a Muslim woman, Tehmina held an absolute acquiescence for the Islamic ideology of marriage, according to which it was sinful for her to stay in a marriage that stood null and void on the day her husband slept with her sister. It is significant to mention here that even before the realization of this shocking reality, Tehmina didn’t have an ideal married life. Abandoned by her parental family, the thirteen years of her married life carried the burden of fulfilling her husband’s demands at the cost of her own happiness and comfort. There had been numerous stark occasions in her married life when she even tried to end her miseries by committing suicide. Despite of these facts, she never had the courage to think of divorce as an option. However, Mustafa’s shameless acceptance of his inclination for Adila left Tehmina with no other alternative in her life except divorce that completely upset her status quo.

In opposition to Tehmina’s agency which was subject to her husband’s sexual encounters, Ammu’s marital breakup in *The God of Small Things* (1997) was impelled simultaneously by her colonial and patriarchal subjectivity. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) is set in Kerala, and is narrated in the third person through the perspectives of Ammu and her daughter, Rahel. Roy’s narration is not chronologically sequenced and it follows digressive patterns. However, the juxtaposition of the present with the memories of the past helps to question the gender and social hierarchies that determine the lives of the characters within the novel. Roy’s narration is framed round random events and repetitive motifs – a compositional structure that mediates the force of history and colonial past on the happenings of the present in an abstract sense. Roy criticizes female agency as an impersonal pattern of behaviour which is
determined by the surrounding ideological forces. In handling the issue of autonomy within Ammu’s divorce decision, Roy has given primacy to the power structures that manoeuvred Amu’s freedom of choice. Much like Tehmina in *My Feudal Lord*, in her married life Ammu tolerated her physical and emotional assaults along with compromising with the moral degradation of her husband. The act of divorcing in Roy’s text is evidenced with the threat of adultery that Ammu faced when her husband (as an attempt to get favours in his job) asked her to mate with his English boss. It was within the problematic of ‘female sexual propriety’ as the sole responsibility of a woman that Ammu left her husband and returned to her parents in Ayemenem. So, looking at Ammu’s circumstances, the reader looks at her decision of stepping out of her husband’s house being mandated by the ideology of sexual morality.

In Qaisra Shahrz’s *Typhoon* (2003), a small village of the interior Sindh forms the locale of the novel. The narration in *Typhoon* (2003) revolves around the divorce incident of a couple (Naghmana and Haroon) and is narrated through the perspectives of numerous characters with their responses and reaction towards this tragic incident. In Shahrz’s novel, the legal system as represented by the village head, apparently pretended to operate in the light of the Shariah, however, symbolizes the sterility of the system to provide justice to women in a society where issues are politicized. In *Typhoon* (2003) the village-head manipulated Naghmana (an outsider in the village), to withdraw from her husband who already had another wife in the village.

All the five novels under study are comparable in the presentation of domestic space as the carrier of patriarchal ideology to claim that space, gender, and experience are intricately related and that space interpolates action and behaviour of a divorced woman. The image of the house is almost invoked as a microcosm of the culture. All these texts establish the distinction between domestic space as women’s and public spaces as men’s in order to sustain and reinforce the patriarchal relations of gendered identity. In other words, the space is conceptualized as the
reflector of social structures which existed and tangibly controlled the actions of female protagonists. Whether, these houses are located in the urban settings as in *My Feudal Lord* (1994), *Ancient Promises* (2000), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), and *The God of Small Things* (1994), or in a remote village, as in *Typhoon* (2003), the norms, beliefs and practices that govern the domestic space are shown to be profoundly patriarchal. They reinforce socio-cultural strictures that are constitutive of a female subjectivity.

This focus on the domestic space in the selected narratives works on two levels. Firstly, it points out the complex mechanism in which domestic space is organized and maintained to control the lives of women in post-colonial society. Domestic spaces perpetuate social ideologies and institutions and discourage females to make their personal choices and decisions. They experience a lack of control over their lives and a sense of being under constant surveillance. Secondly, it also suggests the importance of space in the life of a woman in terms of its physical, social, and financial stabilities. As a dominant narrative contrivance, memory gives abundant evidence of strong patriarchal values and cultural depreciation of female protagonists. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), Roy has presented the grand Ayemenem house as a complex and gendered space for scripting the conservative attitude of the Ayemenem family towards Ammu – the divorced daughter of the house and her twin children. Roy has criticized the ways in which the obstructive space of the house normalized Ammu’s subordination and obfuscated her agentic skills which entirely dragooned her destiny. As a daughter of the house, it was not only that the domestic responsibilities Ammu had to share with Mammachi at a very young age, but her college education was also considered an unnecessary expenditure. Roy has immersed Ammu’s disappointment to get any reasonable proposal at her eighteenth birthday in the desired cultural expectation for a female to get married before her eighteenth birthday. It comes as no surprise, then, that the oppressive ideological figurations of the grand Ayemenem house instilled in her the desire to marry a Bengali Hindu. However, Ammu was conscious of the fact that the transition
from her father’s place to her husband’s house would not give her much of choices in life. In the Keralite culture a married woman is treated as a visitor only in her parent’s house. Ammu’s marital disgrace discredited her to claim a respectable space in Ayemenem house. Thus, Ammu was instantaneously dislodged from the house when she failed to adapt to the power hierarchy of the family structure by transgressing the boundaries of the society committed to the ethos of female subordination.

In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani has also taken up series of gender figurations that impeded Tehmina’s identity and self-determination. The domestic space that Durrani has narrated in the text is riddled with the ideas of gender differences and ideologies of female submissiveness. Tehmina in *My Feudal Lord* (1994) remembered her childhood as burdened with her obligation to learn the ideals of traditional womanhood. For Tehmina, the early years of her life were a training exercise in preparation of her own marriage and motherhood. Tehmina’s parental house carried the ideology of daughters, as temporary guests in their parent’s house, for a female in her culture had no other purpose in life except marriage. Further, her detailed narration of the painful memories of her troubled marital relationship with Mustafa Khar by employing the image of the house effectively articulates marriage as a mechanism of sexual, economic and domestic dependence of a woman on her husband. Both the characters of Ammu in *The God of Small Things* and Tehmina in *My Feudal Lord*, share a certain similarity in the sense that they tried to escape the repressive space of their parents’ houses by entering into a loveless marriage. They suffered mental and physical abuses and divorced only under the potential threat of adultery. What is most unfortunate that they were conscious of the fact that their divorces would not offer them a better chance to survive in a society that takes marriage as a sacred and irrevocable contract.
The focus on the image of the house and its association with divorce is also a recurring idea in *Ancient Promises* (2000) and *Sister of My Heart* (1999). In *Ancient Promises* (2000), Janu, a sixteen years-old schoolgirl was strictly punished and restricted by her father to carry on her education since she was spotted by her father with a schoolboy outside the school premises. Similar to Janu, Sudha in *Sister of My Heart* (1999) was withdrawn from school by her mother because she was accused of talking to a boy outside a cinema hall. While the early years of Janu and Sudha were playful and joyous since they were the only offsprings of their parents, the onset of youth brought an abrupt change in their lives. As a responsibility to protect their daughters’ chastity, their parents terminated their education. They lost their freedom of movement and were confined to their houses until they were married off. Janu and Sudha were morally and emotionally trapped in arranged marriages at the age of eighteen. The parental houses of both Janu and Sudha reflect patriarchal values that considered marriage as an option to preserve the sexual respectability of their daughters. Aside from the claustrophobic experiences in their marital houses, both Janu and Sudha stepped out of house of marriage for they were incapable to deal with the crisis that occurred in their marital relationships with the birth of their daughters.

In *Typhoon* (2003), the image of the house stands out as the transmitter of the dynamics of social space illustrating the importance of the privacy of the marital house as a fundamental component for the sustenance of marriage. Absence of the marital house became the prime reason for the divorce of Naghmana and Haroon in the village kacheri. The doomed fate of these characters hints at the stability of the institution of marriage when only protected by the four walls of the house. Therefore, the tragic village kacheri which was held by the village head to punish the accused couple for their assumed transgression of the social code suggests the way absence of domestic space disrupts the stability of the institution of marriage, and consequently, lead to an unwilling marital breakup.
Characterizing the above line of thought then, is the idea that divorce is not in itself problematic. Within the contexts and conditions in which it is experienced makes it undesirable and thus, figures as a shameful and stigmatic choice for a woman. Divorce thus becomes a way of interrogating the kinds of subordinations and discriminations that frame the subaltern identity of a divorced female subject within the postcolonial fiction. The unhappy endings of all the five novels demonstrate that the oppression of a female divorcée is not limited to a particular social class or locality. They reveal that the most serious conflicts of divorce are not merely the outcome of divorce itself but the result of the gendered discrimination which a woman faces. It is this discrimination that accounts for most of the social, psychological, moral and financial troubles that a female divorcée faces. The absence of viable options in their lives after divorce is indicative of the suppressive social control, which does not favor women who defy the tradition of silent acceptance of their fates. Divorce as a deviation from conventional expectations of the social order that is constituted in the stability of the patriarchal family, therefore, the problems that come out of this deviation are punished by death or exile.

In *My Feudal Lord* (1994) Durrani’s categorical assertion about divorce as destabilizing the very identity of a woman and traditional assumption of divorce as an instance of woman’s failure in her prime duty to sustain the marital harmony seems to hold valid for most of the divorced women in the selected novels. The selected novels suggest divorce as a gendered experience and challenge the limits on female protagonists’ capacities to act independently of structural constraints. Each of the five novels exposes a pervasive patriarchal bias with regard to the idea of divorce and the identity of divorced women. This is particularly evident in the instances of resistance, which the female protagonists faced during and after their divorces.

In *Ancient Promises* (2000) when Janu demanded divorce from her husband, for months she was forcibly put to the hospital bed and kept under heavy doses of tranquillizers, in order to
create the impression that she had gone mad as an effect to her daughter’s insanity. Janu not only suffered the trauma of losing the custody of her little daughter, but also faced great challenges in seeking legal help. Sudha in *Sister of My Heart* (1999) also had to face the severe criticism of the society when she left her husband’s house in order to save the life of her daughter. The most violent reprisal came from her own mother who pressurized Sudha to terminate her pregnancy and return to her husband’s house. Sudha’s mother became the mouthpiece of the orthodox belief that a woman could have many children but a husband is forever. Divakaruni’s divorced protagonist Sudha in *Sister of My Heart* lost her chance to remarry by refusing to accept Ashok’s condition of leaving her daughter to the custody of her mothers. Arundhati Roy reflects this social reality in *The God of Small Things* (1997), when Baby Kochamma unable to tolerate Ammu’s divorce declared Ammu ‘a divorced daughter’ who could never claim a respectable position in the Ayemenem house. Even Ammu’s father didn’t accept her reason to divorce, for he could never imagine that an Englishman, or any Englishman, would desire another man’s wife. Pappachi’s suspicion over Ammu’s divorce thrived on the cultural criteria of a wife’s total submission to a husband’s will and complete silence about any maltreatment.

Tehmina in *My Feudal Lord* met the most overt kinds of resistances. When Tehmina demanded divorce from her influential husband, she was locked into the bathroom of the house by her husband. Similar to Janu’s predicament, her husband not only spread bad rumours about her character, but also took away her children and property. What was particularly unfortunate in Tehmina’s case was that she also had to battle with her mother’s denunciation who did not want to return her house as a divorcee. The conflict between Tehmina and her mother left Tehmina to face the challenge of location after her divorce since she had nowhere to go. Her mother refused to take her back to the house. Being penniless, one of her uncles took pity on her and allowed her to live in her house, and then a few weeks later she had to shift to another uncle’s house. Nevertheless, that too was a temporary stay, since her ex-husband and mother pressurized him to
get her out of the house. Later, one of her cousins lent her empty flat for a month. For months, Tehmina lived like vagabonds and suffered a humiliating lack of confidence and self-esteem until she managed to take her house back from Mustafa Khar. Durrani has criticized the way society forgoes the male transgression and the real culprits are never questioned. In My Feudal Lord (1994), Tehmina laments this social reality by comparing her situation with Mustafa after divorce. Mustafa was free and powerful. He had sixteen servants. He had regained his wealth and his political position was stronger than ever. Whereas, she had lost everything in her life — her children, her house, her family, even her independent identity. Naghmana in Typhoon (2003) turned hysteric when her husband left her alone in the village. His departure was symbolic of Naghmana’s departure from the house of marriage. Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997) and Qaisra Sharaz’s Typhoon (2003), ended with the tragic death of their divorced heroines-Ammu and Naghmana. While, Naghmana –the heroine of Typhoon (2003), though remarried immediately after her divorce had no other way except to commit suicide when her husband came to know about her first marriage and divorce.

In considering the correlations of gender, space, and divorce, this study does not hold the subaltern representation of divorced female protagonist as an imaginative failure on the part of postcolonial women novelists, as the relations and the space within which they divorce remain same after divorce. The presentation of a postcolonial society as exercising extreme disciplinary regimes and restrictions on female freedom suggests that gendered ideologies permeate ways of thinking and behaving in the life of a woman. All these formulations reject the idea that divorce is ineludibly oppressive and instead emphasize that divorced women’s subalternity is located in the social relations within which they divorce. In the figures of Ammu (The God of Small Things 1997), Janu (Ancient Promises 2000), Sudha (Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni 1999), Tehmina (My Feudal Lord 1994) and Naghmana (Typhoon 2003), the social structures they inhabited allowed them to resist in limited ways, as they appear in the novel as subaltern to the power of social
structures. In line with Spivak’s ideas of subaltern figures in literature, this study concludes that postcolonial women novelists limited’ representation regarding divorced female protagonists is a creative choice (rather than an obvious failure) and emphasizes the lack of ‘sovereign agency’ available to the subaltern female divorcee. Indeed, in looking for the instances of subaltern resistances in these narratives, Ammu’s death in the cheap lodge at Bharat Hotel in The God of Small Things (1997), Sudha and Janu’s travel to west in Sister of My Heart (1999) and Ancient Promises (2000), Naghmana’s suicide in Typhoon (2003) and Tehmina’s publication of her personal divorce story in My Feudal Lord (1994) can be interpreted, more expectantly, as an evasive resistance against the power hierarchy which marginalizes them.

The present study with its analysis of the domestic, educational, cultural, social, legal and political status of the divorced woman claims that divorce is a highly sensitive and emotionally charged issue within the studied postcolonial context. This study claims that divorce as an artifice of the postcolonial novel symbolizes subalternity as a complex and heterogeneous state of oppression. Thereby, a divorced female faces oppression on the basis of specific markers of her identity which include gender, class, caste and age. Together with these ideological imperatives, stronger family structures and arrangements, social norms and traditions turn divorce into an undesirable option for the troubled female protagonist. The subalternity of divorced women both as victims of domestic violence and agents of resistance, is constituted through the negotiation of these situations, which cannot be transformed merely through their rejection of oppressive marriages but by changing the whole social setup.

Complex issues generate the subservience of the divorced women in the Pakistani/Indian society, which therefore necessitates an integrated approach towards this issue. The present study points out the role of gender inequalities, ideological barriers and socio-structural constraints of contemporary Indian/Pakistani society that pose multiple challenges to the identity and status of
divorced female protagonists within the fiction selected for the study. This study has made every possible effort to cover the complex dynamics of the divorced women’s life in India and Pakistan. Taken together, all the female protagonists endure the stigma of divorce for the sake of their honour or for the safety and welfare of their children. These narratives do not defy the importance of marriage and tradition. By way of comparison and cross fertilization of similarities and dissimilarities of cultural patterns of Indian and Pakistani society, this study finds some clues to the causes which hinder the emancipation of a divorced woman within the two countries. The presentation of the issue of divorce and the acceptance of the subaltern status of the divorced women extends the realistic silences within the social context of the texts, calling for a strategy of reform from within. This study outlines a few protective measures which can lower a woman’s chance to the marital breakup, ways in which the taboo of female divorce can be broken together with practical steps which at the government scale can minimize the trauma of divorce for an Indian/Pakistani woman:

1. There is a need to acknowledge the fact that the practice of forced and marriages increases the incidence of divorce and separation. This study suggests avoiding early female marriages may prove effective measure in lowering the divorce rates.

2. It is important to consider the educational, economic, religious and cultural harmony between the families of the prospective bride and groom. A woman marrying to a spouse from her own class and status is likely to develop a stable marital relationship.

3. The social mindset needs to be cultured to empathize with divorce women as sufferers of a depraved social order, not as transgressors. Certainly, the mass media can play a powerful role in combating the negative stereotypes and to simultaneously promote the empowerment of divorced women by its realistic projection of the divorce phenomenon. There is also a need to
project positive female attributes and samples of renowned and influential women of the world by the media. This would provide the young girls with the role models to explore their own potentials and autonomous identities.

4. An equal and equitable female access to formal education is suggested as a critical strategy to ensure the financial stability of a woman after divorce.

5. It is imperative to reconsider and reform the current educational curriculum and system to enlarge social awareness regarding female legal rights, protections and entitlements. It is also suggested to include contents regarding gender equality within the curriculum which is likely to familiarize the young minds (both male and female) with the equality of male and female rights in the subsequent years of their life.

6. Divorced women face social and economic challenges in getting the legal support for their marital breakups. Generally, women are unaware of their fundamental constitutional rights to maintenance, dowry reclamation, property division, child-custody, fair and free divorce prerogatives. Therefore, both as a consequence of the unawareness and the inability to access the justice of law, divorce restricts its empowering potentials for a woman. Governments should take effective measures to empower divorced women by eliminating the gender inequalities between male and female sections of the society:

(a) Ensuring the maximum economic self-reliance of women through their free access to education, income generating skills and enhanced employment opportunities
(b) Banning the use of discriminatory practices against women, such as sex-selective abortions, dowry arrangements and expensive wedding ceremonies, and curtailment of the education of daughters
(d) Executing strict charges and penalties to prevent sexual assaults, gender discrimination and domestic violence

(e) Ratifying women’s right to inheritance and joint marital property and assets

(h) Providing appropriate and affordable legal support systems to help women terminate the abusive marital relationships

(i) Safeguarding juristic rulings for maintenance, physical protection, child custody and alimony

(j) Relieving and assisting divorced women to reinstate their lives after divorce by offering a psychological and career counselling, building shelter homes, credit financing and increased employment opportunities.

6.1 Research Recommendations

1. Whereas the idea of ‘gendered subaltern’ has been used in studying the presentation of divorce, however, in the selected novels not all women characters are portrayed in inferior power positions. It is worth examining the ways in which women respond to patriarchal ideologies and practices with which they are confronted, as well as the role women play in maintaining and strengthening patriarchy. Studies ought to be conducted in tracing women’s collusion in patriarchal practices that oppress both the male and female characters.

2. This study has focused on the issue of divorce in the novels written by women novelists. Studies should also be conducted on the male novelists who have dealt with the issue of divorce in their novels. What are their assumptions about the gendered nature of the divorce experience? How do their texts respond to the problems faced by a male divorcee? What does their fiction suggest about the ideological, political, social,
economic, or psychological forces that shape the experiences of divorced male? What social and psychological effects of divorce are shown to be on a male divorcee? How do their novels respond to or comment on the divorce experiences of female characters? This will help generate a postcolonial literary tradition on divorce discourse. It may be worthwhile to examine literary works that present the male perspective on the topic. It is expected that this study will stimulate other scholars to undertake a comparative study that explores the differences and similarities between the male and female perspectives.

3. The theme of divorce is not specific to the writings of postcolonial women novelists. Literature written by a Western canon has also taken up the theme of divorce in their writings. A comparative study might be undertaken to compare fictional works of postcolonial women novelists with that of their western counterparts in order to investigate, for example, the meaningful similarities as well as differences in their fictions regarding the treatment of divorce theme, and more specifically the experiences of divorced women.

4. Not all the male characters in the novels are portrayed as malevolent, oppressors or carriers of patriarchal ideology. This study shows that patriarchal forces, specifically as manifested in the selected texts, privileges males and puts women in subordinate category. However, despite a supposedly privileged male status, patriarchy also constrains the family life of male characters in certain ways. The character and manner of these forces must be examined for a better understanding of their image in fiction. This will facilitate a more balanced approach to critique the real oppressive forces that contribute to the biases and limitations of traditional definitions of patriarchal ideology and will make feminist analysis more productive.
5. Divorce also affects the life of the children of the divorcing couple. Research should be undertaken on the image of the children of divorced mothers and what do the texts reveal about the social and psychological issues which children face after the divorce of their parents.

6. Whereas, the study has found a complex and contested presentation of the institution of motherhood, looking chiefly at how mothering becomes a site of oppression for a divorced woman. By contrast, being a mother of sons contribute to her power and respect in the family and society. Studies ought to be conducted to examine the presentation of both the oppressed and empowering dimensions of motherhood as well as the complex relationship between the two. The focus on power and oppression in motherhood would provide a new perspective to feminist theory.

7. The image of widowhood is another important feature of almost all the postcolonial narratives which this study has approached. Whether a marriage of a female character ends with divorce or with the death of her husband, she is delineated as a subaltern figure within the postcolonial society. Taken together, both a divorced woman and a widowed woman face personal, emotional, social, financial, spatial, legal and cultural restrictions when their marriages end. The only point of dissimilarity in their oppressed statuses is that while a divorced woman becomes target to the social reprisal, the widowed woman is usually sympathized over. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers should take up comparative studies on the postcolonial fictional representation of these two major traumas- divorce and widowhood and the challenges they bring along with them in the life of a woman.
WORKS CITED


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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DIVORCE UNDER HINDU AND MUSLIM LAW

Introduction

“The worst reconciliation is better than the best divorce”- Miguel de Cervantes, El Quijote

The term ‘Divorce’ is derived from the Latin term ‘divortium’ which means to turn aside or separate. Divorce is the legal cessation of a matrimonial bond\(^1\) and thus refers to a situation where a man and wife no longer remain so due to a number of possible reasons, acceptable in law as grounds for divorce.

In the case of Ms. Jordan Diengdeh v. S. Chopra \(^2\), the issue of divorce laws under different religions was addressed and studied. A comparison of the relevant provisions of the Christian marriage act 1872, Hindu marriage act 1955, special marriage act 1954, Parsi marriage and divorce act 1936, dissolution of Muslim marriage act, 1939, show that the law relating to judicial separation, divorce and nullity of marriage is far, far from uniform in different religions.

India has two major legal systems governing personal laws. Hindu law governs Hindus in all aspects of life, and Islamic law governs Muslims in the areas of divorce, marriage, and inheritance. The application of distinct family laws to specific cultural groups is the foremost way in which cultural diversity is recognized. Multicultural institutions often provide unequal rights to citizens, violate individual rights, impede policy change, and restrict cultural exchange.

\(^1\) Kusum, Family Law Lectures, Family Law 1 (2003), Lexis Nexis Butterworths, New Delhi
\(^2\) AIR 1985 SC 935
Some argue that such outcomes are inevitable aspects of multiculturalism. Such criticisms are particularly leveled at plural family law systems. This is because the norms of most groups give the gender unequal rights in family life, or at least did so when plural family law systems initially took shape.

While this separate system of governing in the family law context is still intact, it has faced opposition in recent years from the Hindus, who comprise a clear majority of India's population. Muslims, the second largest religious group in India, total approximately ten percent of the population. Several years ago, the Indian Supreme Court took an unprecedented step and requested that the Central Government enact one civil code applicable to all residents of India, drawing from the mandate of Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, which directs the states to "endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the Best territory of India."

Sources of Law

Muslim Law

Even though there are several sources of Islamic law, for the purpose of comparison, only the most basic sources that apply to Muslims in India are relevant. The essence of Islamic law is the Shari'a doctrine. Shari'a consists of commentaries and scholarship on justice, welfare, and how Muslims should live. The most important text in Islamic law is the Qur'an. Muslims regard the Qur'an as the Prophet Muhammad's seventh century A.D. writings of the word of God. The Qur'an is not a compilation of law per sé; it contains religious and ethical standards to which Muslims must adhere. The Qur’an is an important source to understand the principles and practices associated with divorce under Muslim law.

3 AIR 1985 SC 935
A second source of Islamic law, answering what the Qur'an does not, is the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an gives rise to the Sunnah by saying, "You who believe, obey God and the Prophet ... and if you are at variance over something, refer it to God and the Messenger." The Sunnah, in essence, is a record of the Prophet's sayings, deeds, and silent approval of deeds. Muslim scholars interpreted the Sunnah and transmitted it through narrative records known as hadiths. The most accurate hadiths come from approximately the middle of the ninth century A.D. By following the Sunnah, Muslims hope to achieve Muhammad's perception of God.

A third source of Hanafite law is istihsan, or juristic preference. Pursuant to istihsan, if analogical reasoning leads to a harsh outcome in a situation, then equitable principles can be applied to lessen the severity of the result. At this point, Islamic law in India takes a path different from Islamic law in other countries. These differences arose because foreign states influenced, through invasion and colonization, the various Islamic regions in different ways. While the Middle East has codified Shari'a doctrine, India has implemented a case law system, resulting from its colonization by Great Britain that allows Indian courts to decide cases of Islamic law based upon legal precedent.

Hindu Law

The main source of Hindu law is the Constitution of India, which the Indian Parliament drafted in 1950 as the supreme law of the land. The drafters designed the Constitution to entrench fundamental values, such as the civil and political rights of Indian citizens. The

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4 AIR 1985 SC 935
7 Supra note 2
9 V.S. Deshpande, Nature of the Indian Legal System, The Indian Legal System 1, 7 (Joseph Minattur ed., 1978)
purpose of government became the creation and furtherance of an egalitarian order, not merely the prevention of social inequality\textsuperscript{10}.

The Constitution of India, in keeping with the Theory of Separation of Powers\textsuperscript{11}, delegates legislative powers. List I of the Constitution grants the Central Government the exclusive right to legislate in areas of foreign relations, national security, military affairs, citizenship, commerce, and other national affairs, while List II grants the state governments the exclusive right to legislate in the areas of police administration, public order, education, public health, agriculture, and other local matters. List III is the Concurrent List; it enumerates areas in which both the Central Government and the states may legislate. Union, or federal, legislation in any of these areas, however, supersedes concurrent state legislation\textsuperscript{12}. List III includes family law, criminal law, and economic planning. Because the Central Government has legislated in the area of divorce, any state legislation is inapplicable and only the Union legislation is relevant for the purpose of comparison.

The second source of law is the Hindu Code. The Hindu Code is a compilation of statutes that was created in the mid-1950\textsuperscript{13}, keeping in mind that all such legislation must comply with the Constitution. Working in conjunction with the Code is judicial authority, a creation of the British Empire\textsuperscript{14}. Great Britain colonized India until 1947, infusing into India British concepts of law and jurisprudence that have remained. Great Britain created a legal system dependent upon judicial authority, often called Anglo-Hindu law, to model a common-law system.

\textsuperscript{10} Shiv Sahai Singh, Unification of Divorce Laws in India 257-58 (1993)
\textsuperscript{11} Arvind P Datar, Commentary On The Constitution Of India, Volume 1, second edition (Wadhwa & Wadhwa, Nagpur, 2007)
\textsuperscript{13} J. Duncan M. Derrett, Hindu Law, in An Introduction to Legal Systems, 80, 83 (J. Duncan M. Derrett ed., 1968)
\textsuperscript{14} Id
The final source of law is the Dharmasastra, a system the Brahmin class founded upon religious perceptions of righteousness. Dharmasastra dates back to the sixth century B.C. At its inception, Dharmasastra was applicable to only the higher castes; though in modern times the Court takes these principles into consideration.

**Divorce – Muslim Law**

In Muslim law, Marriage (Nikah), is a Civil Contract between the Husband, (Zawj): and the Wife, (Zawja)\(^\text{15}\). The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 subjects Muslims in India to Islamic personal laws. This Act states, in relevant part:

**Application of Personal Law to Muslims.**-- Notwithstanding any custom or usage to the contrary, in all questions ... regarding intestate succession, special property of females, including personal property inherited or obtained under contract or gift or any other provision of Personal Law, marriage, dissolution of marriage, including talaq, ila, zihar, lian, khula and mubaraat, ... the rule of decision in cases where the parties are Muslims shall be the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat).

According to Islamic law, there are several methods by which one spouse may divorce another. Because marriage is considered a contract between husband and wife, divorce or repudiation can terminate only a valid marriage contract; if the contract was not valid, either the couple or a court must annul the marriage\(^\text{16}\). The methods of terminating a marriage are:

- **Repudiation of the marriage contract,**

- **Divorce by mutual agreement,**

\(^\text{15}\) Pg. 161, Joseph Schacht, An Introduction to Islamic Law(1997), First Indian Reprint, Universal Law Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd. Delhi

• Divorce by court order, or

• Divorce by law.

Each of these methods is examined in sequence below.

Repudiation

By the Husband

The most well-known form of divorce in Islam is that of repudiation, known formally as talaq. Before a couple can be divorced by repudiation, the couple must allow two judges, one representing each spouse, to attempt a reconciliation; if reconciliation is impossible, repudiation can occur\(^{17}\). Repudiation is a right, with some qualifications, for husbands under Islam. The repudiating husband must be of majority age and sane. Furthermore, the husband must not be in a state of heightened emotion, namely rage or shock. Interestingly, the husband does not have to be free of coercion or intoxication to repudiate, and pronouncements of talaq as threats, oaths, or in jest are binding. With these mandates fulfilled, a husband can divorce his wife if he follows the formal requirements.

The formal requirements are minimal. Words of repudiation, whether written or spoken, must be clear and unequivocal. The words must proclaim a divorce, or talaq. If the words are not explicit, the husband must prove that his words show intent to divorce. It has been held\(^{18}\) that the wife need not be present during, nor given notice of, the divorce for it to be effective.

Finally, the pronouncement can be either absolute, affecting a divorce immediately, or conditional, affecting a divorce upon the occurrence of some event or conduct.

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\(^{17}\) S. Jaffer Hussain, Marriage Breakdown and Divorce Law Reform in Contemporary Society 197 (1983)

Upon fulfilment of the above conditions, the Qur'an provides for three forms of approved repudiation, known as talaq-us-sunnat. The first two forms consist of a single pronouncement of divorce and both are called talaq-ul-ahsan. The Qur'an establishes the first talaq-ul-ahsan with the following phrase: "O you who believe, when you marry believing women then divorce them before having (sexual) contact with them, you have no right to demand observance of the 'waiting period' of them."\(^{19}\) This portion of the Qur'an states that if a husband repudiates the marriage before it is consummated, the repudiation is effective immediately. This is the only form of repudiation that occurs prior to consummation of the marriage.

The second type of talaq-ul-ahsan occurs after consummation of the marriage. By virtue of the procedures for the two, the first form is the most favored. In order to repudiate pursuant to the second form of talaq-ul-ahsan, a husband should proclaim talaq during a period when his wife is not menstruating and abstain from marital relations with her for a certain amount of time after the proclamation, a period known as the iddat.

Prior to completion of the iddat, the husband can revoke the repudiation, even without his wife's consent\(^{20}\), by either words of revocation or resuming marital relations with his wife\(^{21}\). If the husband does not revoke the repudiation in that time, the repudiation is effectuated and the couple can be rejoined only by remarriage. According to the Qur'an, a husband can repudiate twice and revoke each time without problem.

Repudiating a third time yields the second kind of talaq-us-sunnat, talaq-ul-hasan\(^{22}\). The third pronouncement of talaq finalizes the repudiation immediately. The husband can no longer

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19 Al-Qur’an, 33:49
20 The wife's consent would clearly not be required if she were never aware of the declaration of talaq. Shiv Sahai Singh, Unification of Divorce Laws in India, 257-58 (1993)
revoke because the repudiation is final. The iddat is considered over and the former couple can no longer engage in marital relations. The only way for the couple to be reunited is for the wife to marry another and for that second husband to divorce her after consummation of the marriage. After that divorce, the first husband may remarry the wife. Islamic law favours repudiations that can be revoked, namely the first and second pronouncements of talaq. This is probably because such repudiations allow for resumption of the marriage.

In providing for revocable talaq, however, the Qur'an does not treat repudiation lightly. The Qur'an calls for the husband to "keep [women] honourably (by revoking the divorce) or let them go with honour." For this reason, repetitive repudiations are considered mockeries of God's will and are looked upon with contempt by the Qur'an.

There are also two methods of irrevocable repudiation, otherwise known as talaq-ul-biddat, that the Islamic community disapproves of because the procedures do not follow the Qur'an's mandates:

- "triple talaq" - The husband proclaims talaq three times by saying either (1) "I divorce thee three times" or (2) "I divorce thee" three times in succession.
- The husband makes one, irrevocable pronouncement.

If either form of talaq-ul-biddat occurs, the repudiation is final at pronouncement, and a remarriage is required if the couple wishes to be reunited.

B. By the wife

23 Al-Qur'an, 2:231
24 Supra note 19
The Qur'an states that "Women also have recognized rights as men have, though men have an edge over them."\textsuperscript{26} The right of husbands to repudiate is also a right of wives, but in limited form. A wife's power to repudiate is limited because a wife can have the right of talaq only if her husband expressly delegates his power to repudiate to her. For that reason, this form of repudiation is called "delegated divorce."\textsuperscript{27} The husband can delegate the power for any length of time and with any restrictions or conditions he chooses. For the wife's talaq to be valid, she must prove that any conditions allowing her to exercise her power have occurred and that she did exercise her power\textsuperscript{28}.

**Divorce by Mutual Agreement**

The Qur'an says, "If you fear you cannot maintain the bounds fixed by God, there will be no blame on either if the woman redeems herself."\textsuperscript{29} This method is called mubaraat\textsuperscript{30}. When the parties agree to a divorce, the marriage is irrevocably dissolved.

**Divorce by the Court**

A. Lian

The Qur'an regulates the lian manner of divorce. The Qur'an states\textsuperscript{31}:

"Those who accuse their wives and do not have any witnesses except themselves, should swear four times in the name of God, the testimony of each such person being that he is speaking the truth, and (swear) a fifth time that if he tell a lie the curse of God be on him. The woman's punishment can be averted if she swears four times by God as testimony that her husband is a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Al-Qur'an, 2:228
\item \textsuperscript{27} John L. Esposito, Women in Muslim Family Law, 135 n.2 (1982)
\item \textsuperscript{28} Buffatan Bibi v. Abdul Salim, 1950 A.I.R. (Cal.) 304
\item \textsuperscript{29} Al-Qur’an, 2:229
\item \textsuperscript{30} Supra note 19
\item \textsuperscript{31} Id
\end{itemize}
lier, her fifth oath being that the curse of God be on her if her husband should be speaking the truth."

Upon being accused of adultery, a wife can file suit to compel her husband to retract the accusation or swear the oath that the Qur'an requires. During this time, when the suit is filed, the couple cannot engage in marital relations\textsuperscript{32}. If the husband retracts his accusation, the wife is not entitled to a divorce and the couple can resume normal relations. If the husband does not retract his statement, the wife can file for divorce and must swear her own oath of innocence\textsuperscript{33}; a hearing is then held on the charge of adultery. Lian applies only when the husband accuses the wife of adultery, and not the other way around.

\textbf{Faskh}

While the Qur'an does not promote divorce, it states, "If you fear a breach between the couple appoint one arbiter from the people of the man and one from the people of the woman. If they wish to have a settlement then God will reconcile them ...."\textsuperscript{34} This provision is interpreted to mean that the Qur'an permits Muslims to divorce pursuant to legal standards. In 1939, British India enacted the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act ("DMMA"). The DMMA provides grounds for marriage dissolution unrecognized prior to its enactment\textsuperscript{35}. Only a wife can file for divorce under the DMMA; a husband cannot invoke the DMMA to divorce his wife. This is probably because husbands have broad talaq rights and do not need the rights that the DMMA gives. The most important implications of the DMMA are that it:

- raises the stature of Muslim women in the family law context, and

\textsuperscript{32} Supra note 25
\textsuperscript{33} Al-Qur'an, 24:8-9
\textsuperscript{34} Al-Qur'an, 4:35
\textsuperscript{35} Because the DMMA adopts non-traditional grounds for divorce for Muslims, it is considered a departure from Shari'a.
- does not differentiate between the Islamic schools\textsuperscript{36}.

The DMMA lists a variety of grounds upon which a woman can be entitled to a decree of divorce; only one of them need exist for a divorce to be granted. Though the grounds are listed in no particular order, they can be divided into four separate categories:

**Injury or Discord**

This first category allows a Muslim wife to file for divorce on the ground that her husband caused her injury, covering both emotional and physical injuries. A husband forcing his wife to commit immoral acts or lead an immoral life is also a form of injury. Injury, however, is not a prerequisite to divorce within this category, as discord within the couple will suffice. Discord, as a reason for divorce, must go further than mere disagreements between husband and wife. The husband must take control over his wife's property without her consent, interfere with his wife's religious practices, or treat her in violation of the Qur'an.

- **Defect on the part of the husband**

The second category allows a Muslim wife to file for divorce if her Muslim husband has some type of defect. By defect, it is meant that the husband either has become impotent since the marriage took place, has been insane for two years, or has leprosy or venereal disease. Before a court grants a divorce on grounds of impotence, however, the husband can have the ruling stayed for one year to give him time to prove to the court that his impotence no longer exists. If the husband so proves, no divorce will be entered. According to some scholars, these grounds are based upon the treatment of marriage as a contract in Islam. It is possible that the rationale is that if the wife enters into marriage with the expectation that her husband is "whole"

\textsuperscript{36} Supra note 19
and can produce children, the absence of any of these attributes should suffice as a condition for divorce\textsuperscript{37}.

\textbf{• Failure to provide for maintenance}

Under the DMMA, a husband’s failure to maintain to provide maintenance to the wife is a separate ground for divorce\textsuperscript{38}. The courts have given a very wide interpretation to this clause and held that the wife is entitled to a decree of divorce wherein failure to neglect to maintain arises owing to his poverty, loss of work and so on, the wife is still entitled to a divorce where she has not been the direct cause of the same\textsuperscript{39}. In the case of Mehafoz Alam Dastagirsab Killedar Vs. Shagufta\textsuperscript{40}, the woman had left the husband, and nevertheless claimed maintenance, the law was torn between providing women who deserted their husbands with a lottery in the form of maintenance and between allowing men who ill-treated women to the point of leaving, the benefit of their wrong-doing. Despite it being alleged on the side of the male, that the woman had left of her own accord, had never demanded maintenance, and did not require maintenance, it was held that maintenance was a ground for which she could sue if it were not given to her as required. Hence, the ground of neglect was proved. Here is laid out the intention of the legislature to protect women, being a needy section of the society, hence, the provisions must be read in their favor.

\textbf{• Absence or imprisonment of the husband}

\textsuperscript{37} A N Saha, Marriage and Divorce, 6th Ed. (2002) Eastern law house, New Delhi
\textsuperscript{38} Paras diwan, Family Law, 7th Ed. Reprint (2006), Allahabad Law Agency Faridabad
\textsuperscript{39} Supra note 36
\textsuperscript{40} AIR 2003 Kant 373
A wife may file for divorce if her husband is missing or becomes imprisoned. If the husband is missing for four years, the court shall grant a divorce. The wife must notify the people who would be her husband's heirs and such heirs have a right to be heard. If granted, the divorce shall not take effect for six months; if the husband or his agent comes forth within those six months and promises the husband will fulfil his marital duties, the court must set aside the decree. Also, the wife can file for divorce if and when her husband is sentenced to incarceration for seven or more years.

Divorce by Law

Two situations can exist whereby a previously valid marriage will become invalid, making a divorce or court order unnecessary:

• Change of one spouse's religion

Conversion is referred to as ‘apostasy’ under Muslim Law. A Muslim may cease to be a Muslim merely by renouncing his faith. It may be express or implied; while formal conversion to another religion also amounts to apostasy.

- Apostasy of the Husband results in instant dissolution of the marriage; the wife need not observe Iddat.

- Apostasy of a formerly non-Muslim Muslim wife, will also result in dissolution

- Apostasy of a Muslim wife does not bar her from suing for divorce under section 2 of the DMMA. It does not dissolve the marriage.

- If she remarries before the dissolution of the marriage, she can be prosecuted for bigamy.

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41 Supra note 36
• **Creation of a prohibited relation.**

In essence, the Qur’an discourages intra-family relations. With respect to this paper, this proclamation means that, if one spouse commits a sexual act with an ascendant or descendant of the other, the couple could be considered related and the marriage is dissolved.43

**Divorce – Hindu Law**

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 ("HMA") is the law that governs Hindu divorces. The HMA applies:

- To any person who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms or developments, including a Virashaiva, a Lingayat or a follower of the Brahma, Prarthna or Arya Samaj,

- To any person who is a Buddhist, Jaina or Sikh by religion, and

- To any other person domiciled in the territories to which this Act extends who is not Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion (emphasis added).

As the HMA explicitly states, it does not apply to Muslims. This is the clearest example of the absence of church-state separation in India; religion plays a large role in the application of laws.

The HMA made two changes to the prior rule: it sanctioned only monogamous marriages and introduced the concept of divorce. Another differentiating aspect of the HMA is that both wives and husbands can invoke it; the HMA is gender neutral. In 1976, the Central Government amended the HMA to its current state via the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act. The amendments introduced the "breakdown principle" as a ground for divorce; couples could

42 Id
43 Supra note 14
get divorced for the simple reason that the marriage was not working. The HMA, as amended, is divided into two sections: marriages considered voidable and grounds for divorce, and for the purposes of comparison with Muslim law, only the latter needs to be taken into account.

Hindu spouses in India can petition for a judicial decree of divorce either on fault grounds or by mutual consent. The HMA provides a list of circumstances, each of which can serve as grounds for divorce. These grounds can be best categorized into:\(^{44}\):

- Mistreatment of the petitioning spouse,
- Illness on the part of the respondent spouse,
- Absence of the respondent spouse,
- Religious conversion of the respondent spouse, and
- Mutual consent.

One interesting aspect of this statute is that Indian courts may not hear petitions for divorce until one year of the marriage has elapsed; there is an exception to this rule, however, in circumstances in which extreme hardship or depravity are factors\(^ {45}\). The most obvious reasoning behind this provision is that the legislature intends to provide couples married less than a year and seeking a divorce an attempt at reconciliation before separating.

**Mistreatment**

Hindus can divorce on grounds that the respondent spouse has mistreated the petitioning spouse. The mistreatment can be adultery or either mental or physical cruelty. Adultery is a serious

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\(^{44}\) ss. 13 – 13B, Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

\(^{45}\) S. 14(1) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
matrimonial lapse and even the most liberal of societies view this as extremely damaging to a harmonious marital relationship. The word ‘adultery’ is not explicitly defined anywhere, except in a most limited sense in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 as ‘voluntary sexual intercourse with any person other than his or her spouse’. Under Section 13(1)(i) and Section 10(1) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, either the husband or the wife may file a petition for dissolution of marriage or judicial separation, respectively, on the ground that the other party ‘has, after the solemnisation of the marriage, had voluntary sexual intercourse with any person other than his or her spouse’. This provision was amended in 1976 by the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act, and now a single act of voluntary sexual intercourse by a party with any person other than his/her spouse is sufficient to prove adultery.\(^{46}\)

Cruelty is a ground for matrimonial relief, and the same has not been defined either. This is rightly so as human behaviour is diverse, and what is construed as cruelty today, may not have been so a few decades back\(^ {47}\). Section 13(1)(ia) of the HMA states that a marriage may be dissolved on the ground that the other party has ‘after the solemnisation of the marriage, treated the petitioner with cruelty.’

**Illness**

This category pertains to marriages in which the respondent spouse suffers from some form of illness. Under the shastric law, there was no concept of a voidable marriage. Though marriage with a lunatic or idiot was not viewed with favour and was rather discouraged by the shastras, but such a marriage, if performed was not treated as void\(^ {48}\). Thus, the marriage of a lunatic who was not so insane so as to not understand that he was being married was held not to

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\(^{46}\) Amita v. AK Rathore, (2000) 1 HLR 588 (MP)

\(^{47}\) Supra note 1

\(^{48}\) Banerjee, The Hindu Law of Marriage and Stridhana, 1923, pp 40-41
be invalid\textsuperscript{49}. According to another view, however, such marriages should not be held to be valid\textsuperscript{50}. The law on the point has now been settled as under s. 12 (1)(b), stating that such marriage is only voidable and not void.

Under s. 5(ii) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, if either party to the marriage is:

a) incapable of giving a valid consent to it in consequence of unsoundness of mind; or

b) though capable of giving a valid consent, has been suffering from mental disorder of such kind or to such an extent as to be unfit for marriage and the procreation of children; or

c) has been subject to recurrent attacks of insanity,

then the marriage shall be voidable and may be annulled by a decree of nullity. It must be mentioned that the crucial time is the time of the marriage, and thus, where a party had suffered from an occasional mental derangement before marriage but was cured at the time of the marriage; there can be no decree of annulment\textsuperscript{51}.

With respect to physical illnesses, though matrimonial law cannot take notice of every kind of physical abnormality as affording a ground for relief, there are certain serious diseases which it would take into account in its provisions relating to matrimonial reliefs. Under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, as amended in 1976, divorce is available if the other party is suffering from ‘virulent and incurable form of leprosy’.

**Desertion**

\textsuperscript{49} Kaura Devi v. Indra Devi, AIR 1943 All 310
\textsuperscript{50} DN Mitter, The Position of Women in Hindu Law; see also Gupte, Hindu Law of Marriage, 1976, pp 16 and 135
\textsuperscript{51} Munishwar Dutt v. Indra Kumari, AIR 1963 Punj 449
Living together is the essence of marriage; living apart is its negation. If one spouse is absent for a period of time or convicted of a crime, the other spouse has a valid reason for divorce. As pointed out by the apex court in Savitri Pandey v. Prem Chandra Pandey:

Desertion for the purpose of seeking divorce under the Act means the intentional permanent forsaking and abandonment of one spouse by the other without that other’s, consent and without reasonable cause. In other words, it is a total repudiation of the obligations of marriage. Desertion is not the withdrawal from a place, but from a state of things... Desertion is not a single act complete in itself, it is a continuous course of conduct to be determined under the facts and circumstances of each case.

However, in Bipinchandra Jai Singhbai Shah v. Prabhavati, which was a case under the Bombay Hindu Divorce Act, 1947, the court lucidly defined and explained the concept of desertion. It held that if a spouse abandons the other in a state of temporary passion, for example, anger or disgust without intending permanently to cease cohabitation, it will not amount to desertion.

Therefore, there are two essentials so far as the deserted spouse is concerned:

• the absence of consent; and

• the absence of conduct giving reasonable cause to the spouse leaving the matrimonial home to form the necessary intention aforesaid.

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52 Supra note 1
53 ss. 13(1)(ib), (vi), (2)(ii) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
54 Werner Menski, Modern Indian Family Law, (Routledge, 2001)
55 AIR 1957 SC 176
Further, the petitioner for divorce bears the burden of proving those elements in the two spouses respectively.

**Conversion**

Religion is a very sensitive and personal aspect of individual’s life and the Constitution of India guarantees the freedom of conscience and religion to people of all denominations. Thus, a person is free to profess any faith or relinquish his faith of birth and convert to any other religion. In keeping with the highly religious tradition of India, this category allows for divorce if one spouse either:

- changes his or her religion from Hinduism, or
- renounces the world by entering a holy order after the marriage has been performed.

The logic underlying the grant of relief in case of conversion is, however, not merely a legal one, viz that after conversion, the convert will be governed by different personal law, but also because conversion could mean a radical change in the personality of the convert.\(^{56}\)

Conversion could have the following legal effects on the marriage:

i) An automatic dissolution of the marriage

ii) A ground for divorce at the instance of the non-convert

iii) A ground for divorce at the instance of the convert

The issue whether a marriage performed under the Hindu law can be dissolved under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 by a spouse who ceases to be a Hindu by conversion to another religion, \(^{56}\) AIR 1957 SC 176
was considered by the Delhi High Court in Vilayat Raj v. Sunita\textsuperscript{57}, where it was held that the relevant date on which both parties are required to be Hindus in order to file a petition under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 is the date of marriage and not the date of filing the petition. According to the Court, even though the HMA does not make any specific provision to this effect, the converted spouse would nonetheless be entitled to file a suit under it because he is not seeking any relief on the ground of conversion nor is his case based on it in any manner. Thus, it implies that even upon conversion, a converted spouse can go to court and seek relief under the provisions of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, provided he does not base the relief on the ground of his conversion.

\textbf{Mutual Consent}

Under the "breakdown principle"\textsuperscript{58}, the couple can agree to be divorced. The parties must allege that "they have been living separately for a period of one year or more, that they have not been able to live together and that they have agreed that the marriage should be dissolved."\textsuperscript{59} One interesting feature of this method is that the court cannot act sooner than six months after and not later than eighteen months after the petition is filed. The waiting period is imposed for the purpose of giving the couple a chance to reconcile and withdraw the filing.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In 1937, India, as a colony of Great Britain, allowed Muslims to follow Islamic family law. The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 had two effects. The first was to give Muslims religious autonomy; they could observe the family laws of their own religion without ramification. The second effect was to empower Muslim husbands at the expense of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{57} ID
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Supra note 1
  \item \textsuperscript{59} AIR 1983 Del 351
\end{itemize}
their Muslim wives. India, with the Shariat Act alone, allowed a husband to divorce his wife at the mere pronouncement of the word talaq, but Islam granted a wife that right only if her husband delegated it to her. This left Muslim wives with limited means of escaping abusive or otherwise harmful marriages.

The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 changed that. The DMMA gave Muslim wives the legal means for obtaining divorces. It also lists the grounds upon which Muslim wives can file for divorce. By 1940, Muslim husbands had the right to divorce by talaq and lian, and wives could resort to faskh. While not granting wives the same talaq rights as husbands, the DMMA certainly closed the gap between the two spouses.

Meanwhile, Hindus had no national form of divorce at all. The Indian Parliament gave Hindus the statutory right to divorce in 1955. The HMA, unlike the DMMA, empowers both wives and husbands. It puts both spouses on the same level and applies only to Hindus and other enumerated religious groups.

First impression would dictate that the existence of two sets of family laws in India would create a legal nightmare. It is interesting, considering the strife-ridden past of the Hindus and Muslims, that the DMMA closely resembles the HMA. India enacted the DMMA eight years before gaining independence in 1947 from Great Britain and enacted the HMA eight years after independence. Clearly, British control over India in 1939 influenced passage of the DMMA, but India was independent when it passed the HMA in 1955. Nevertheless, Great Britain, while not having actual control over India in 1955, had already left its mark there, and its colonization may have influenced the Hindu family law system. The exposure to Western notions of divorce impacted India just when it was about to create its own system of government. In a sense, it is not surprising that Hindus and Muslims in India share concepts of when marriages should no longer continue; a common experience of colonization helped imbibe
those concepts. It appears that, although the laws appear to be non-secular because of the Shariat Act, the family law system of India actually is secular. Despite the similarities, though, there are differences.

The most obvious difference between the systems is the Muslim husband's right of talaq. Because this right stems from the Qur'an, an Islamic text, the Hindus do not share it. Another difference is the ground for divorce based upon criminal behaviour, in which the DMMA is broader than the HMA. While Islamic law grants a divorce if the husband is sentenced for any crime, Hindu law grants a divorce only in cases where the respondent is guilty of a sexual crime. One possible explanation is that Great Britain had "liberal" views toward divorce, and the DMMA, as a product of British India, also had "liberal" provisions for divorce. Consequently, the independent and socially conservative that enacted the HMA sought to limit the grounds for divorce based upon criminal behaviour.

It would be interesting to see what effect a uniform civil code would have upon these laws and on India. The biggest result would be that either Muslims would give up the right of talaq or Hindus would be given such a right. Both seem equally unlikely in light of the pervasive religious underpinnings of Hindu and Islamic society. The claim that a uniform civil code is a means to oppressing the Muslim minority is one that both Muslim husbands and wives could make. Muslim husbands could allege that losing the right of talaq is an affront to their cultural traditions and their "status" as husbands. Muslims wives could argue only that their tradition will suffer; a uniform code would empower Muslim wives by making them less susceptible to such an informal method of divorce as talaq. If husbands are given a power to divorce under the DMMA as their wives are, so that the DMMA and HMA both apply to husbands and wives, it is difficult to see what objection Muslims would have. The argument

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60 Werner Menski, Modern Indian Family Law, (Routledge, 2001)
comes back to talaq being a Qur'an-ordained tradition. Perhaps the real issue is what place ancient tradition should have in a world governed by modern rules.