

Chapter II

Parenting: The Nexus of Human Life

Parents are instrumental in shaping the views, opinions, attitudes, characters, and behaviours of their children. The proper blending of the mother's feminine tenderness and the father's masculine supervision is of utmost importance to nurture the physical, emotional, and social development of the child. Vivian L. Gadsden, Morgan Ford, and Heather Breiner (ed.) in the book, *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8* (2016), reiterate the words of Bornstein, who opines that "...particular and continuing task of parents and other caregivers is to enculturate children . . . to prepare them for socially accepted physical, economic, and psychological situations that are characteristic of the culture in which they are to survive and thrive" (20). Parents should inculcate the values, traditions, and customs of the family to groom the personality of children. They have the responsibility to prepare them for independent adulthood and ensure a sense of security. Trust and mutual understanding between parents and children are the real secret for the happy life-learning process of the child. The children comprehend the reality of the outside world through parental upbringing.

Parenting indoctrinates essential characteristic attributes to a child namely, emotional intelligence – to handle emotional situations of life in an intelligent manner; value orientation – the attunement of a child towards positive or negative values; and social adjustment – the ability of the child to have a harmonious adjustment with his/her social surroundings. Parenting is regarded to be a challenge and the child's nurturance

tends to vary based on factors that include culture, personality, parental background, educational level, socio-economic status, and family size. It is a skill acquired over time as there is no definite thumb rule to perfect parenting traditions. Roshni Sondi in the article “Parenting Adolescents in India: A Cultural Perspective” writes about the journey of parenting as, “...excitement and of anxiety; of happiness and of troubles; of discovery and of bewilderment; and of breaks with the past and yet of links with the future” (92).

Parenting is a responsibility that demands patience, empathy, and adaptability, as parents navigate the challenges and joys of raising the future generation. It is multidimensional, and the parental involvement, approach, and supervision throughout the formative years of the child contribute to establish attachment and interconnectedness in the parent-child relationship. It has to be indulgent and approachable to facilitate the child to be happy and healthy. Diana Baumrind, the famous psychologist conceptualises specific practices of parenting, namely the authoritarian, authoritative, uninvolved, and permissive, according to the parental behaviour and mindset of the children.

Authoritarian parents tend to have a one-way mode of communication; they are strict disciplinarians, who rely on physical punishment and withdrawal of affection to shape their child’s behaviour. Parental expectations from the children are high and they generally restrain from providing the reasons behind following the imposed rules and regulations. Authoritarian parenting is restrictive and punitive with low parental responsiveness and high parental demand. The parental treatment of authoritarian parenting is hostile and the parent-child relationship has limited flexibility. The children tend to rebel against their authoritarian parents when they are not encouraged to act or

make choices independently. They may lack social competence and are supposed to be vulnerable to stress, anger, and anxiety.

The authoritative style of parenting, otherwise known as democratic parenting, is characterised by a child-centered approach. Authoritative parents are in tune with the needs of their children, communicate frequently, guide them through open and honest discussions, teach moral values, and help them to develop reasoning skills. They administer fair and consistent discipline when the children tend to break the familial rules. They have significant involvement in the growth and development of the children. They help the children to develop social competence and provide the children with necessary support to face the challenges of life. The rapport between authoritative parents and their children results in healthier outcomes as the children turn out to be well-behaved, responsible, matured, competent, successful, and assertive.

The uninvolved parents are emotionally detached, do not impose stringent rules, and have either few or no expectations from the child. They have minimal communication with their children and do not provide the necessary physical and emotional nurturance. The negligence of parental support has undesirable consequences that affect the physical, emotional, and mental health of the child. It also induces abnormal behaviour in the children, who are anxious and stressed due to less parental assistance. Permissive parents take the role of a friend as their children enjoy an amiable childhood along with unquestioned liberty. They avoid confrontations in the parent-child relationship and help their children to cultivate an attitude to be independent which assists to develop good social skills and interpersonal communication.

Intentionally or unintentionally, parenting is biased and the nurturance of male and female children varies as the fondness and obsession for sons remain strong among Indian parents, who marginalise daughters in terms of gender. The status of girl children is significantly less than that of male children and they become more susceptible to emotional neglect and child abandonment. In the Indian scenario, male children have been historically associated with the belief of continuing the family lineage resulting in a culture that tends to celebrate the birth of sons with pride and joy while the birth of female children has been regarded with less enthusiasm. A boy child is expected to be the breadwinner assuring financial security for the family, and the stakeholder of the family property whereas a girl child is considered to culminate the paternal family hierarchy to join the marital family. The preferential parental treatment honours the success and the privileges of a boy child, but suppresses the potential and robs the self-confidence of a girl child.

The novels of Manju Kapur represent the parent-child relationship in the Indian cultural context and focus on the prejudiced fostering of girl children in Indian families. The women protagonists of Manju Kapur – Virmati, in the novel *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in the novel, *A Married Woman*, Nisha in the novel, *Home*, Nina in the novel, *The Immigrant*, Shagun, and Ishita in the novel, *Custody* and Tapti Gaina in the novel, *Brothers* are victims of gender discrimination right from childhood and it makes them defy gender preferences in childbirth. They are disappointed when their parents favour the male children and disregard their talents, aspirations, and worth, perpetuating the cycle of inequality. The interpretations of Manju Kapur correspond with the ideology of Simon de Beauvoir, who in *The Second Sex* states that, “One is not born a woman, but

becomes one...” due to the family circumstances and parental nurturance (Beauvoir 1). The women protagonists Virmati, Astha, Nisha, and Ishita are espoused to authoritarian parenting practice; the nurturance of Nina and Shagun is appropriated to authoritative parenting and the upbringing of Tapti Gaina is in accordance with permissive parental practice.

Virmati, the protagonist of the novel *Difficult Daughters*, is born in the reputed orthodox Arya Samaj family and her parents, Kasturi and Suraj Prakash are authoritarian in raising their girl children. The parents nurture the girl children to mimic the role of the mother to acquire feminine skills as their prime duty is to fulfill the domestic obligations and be the caretaker of the family members. The intellectual minds of the daughters remain unfurnished and they are groomed to be dynamic wives and proficient mothers. Virmati and her sisters are educated in the subjects of domestic organisation and kitchen management with an expectation to develop their “...mind for the benefit of the family” (DD 17). The parents fail to realise that education for girl children would enable their daughters to develop individuality and reform their despondent and monotonous lives in the patriarchal family and society.

Kasturi, an educated mother, loses the opportunity to sharpen her intellectuality as her life is directed towards domesticity, marriage, and child-bearing. Manju Kapur implies that “During Kasturi’s formal schooling it was never forgotten that marriage was her destiny. After she graduated, her education continued in the home. Her mother tried to ensure her future happiness by the impeccable nature of her daughter’s qualifications. She was going to please her in-laws” (DD 62). Kasturi becomes a child-bearing machine until the birth of a male-heir to the Arya Samaj family. Ruby Milhoutra in the article

“Existential Images of Women in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*” writes that “Kasturi’s repeated pregnancies made her sickly, resulting in her total dependence on Virmati to manage her household. As a natural consequence her unique position in the home is lost which she has to yield to her daughter quite unwillingly. Virmati thus becomes a ‘substitute’ ...that every mother wants her daughter to be” (165). Kasturi is incapable of parenting her eleven children single-handedly; the roles of the mother and daughter are reversed when Kasturi relegates the child-care responsibilities to her eldest daughter, Virmati at the age of seven. She confines Virmati under the duress of household logistics and assigns the child with age-inappropriate duties like cooking for the family, washing the utensils, feeding the siblings, and doing the laundry. She expects her daughter to assist her indefinitely without the reciprocity to cater to Virmati’s needs. Kasturi should have prioritised Virmati’s happiness, joy, pleasures, and contentment of her childhood instead of pressurising her daughter to shoulder the familial burdens.

Virmati is overburdened with household errands from dawn to dusk which are beyond her capability to cope with, resulting in mental stress and anxiety. She becomes a parentified child, who undertakes the parenting and adult responsibilities of feeding and comforting her younger siblings. Initially, she finds it difficult to step into the parental shoes, but gradually she gains the experience of motherhood at a tender age. She becomes benevolent and comfortable in her role reversal as the ‘child-parent’ of her siblings. Manju Kapur comments that, “Ever since Virmati could remember she had been looking after children. It wasn’t only baby Parvati to whom she was indispensable, to her younger siblings she was second mother as well” (DD 6). The siblings find motherly comfort in

Virmati which nourishes the essence of connectedness and co-dependency in their bond. The experience to rear her siblings reveals Virmati's level of maturity at a young age.

Virmati hides her frustration and mental stress to ensure that her siblings lead a normal life. Nurturing her siblings with emotional and practical support, Virmati finds it difficult to step out of her motherly role and becomes a martyr when she compromises her education to be an exclusive guardian of her siblings. Virmati prioritises the needs of her mother above her own, gives up her dreams and goals to gratify the needs of her siblings, and has never said a 'no' to the physical labour imposed on her. She loses the ability to put her feelings into words as she is left with very little space to know or express her own needs and desires. The parents of Virmati, hidden in the layers of societal expectations, hurt their daughter physically and emotionally.

Virmati receives no words of appreciation or recognition from her parents for her diligence and sacrifices. She leads a life of serfdom in the domineering familial atmosphere with no joy and happiness. The word childhood does not hold true for Virmati as she is deprived of jubilant and exciting childhood experiences which are expressed by Manju Kapur as "...Virmati's attempts to spin webs of love through her devotion were met by exasperation" (DD 11). She does not receive the attention, love, and affection of her parents to comfort her physical and emotional exhaustion. The parents neglect to relish the delights of the childhood days of their daughter, ignoring her choices, wishes, and desires while Virmati develops a deep sense of anger, depression, insecurity, and uncertainty due to the unfriendly parent-child relationship.

Kasturi and Suraj Prakash trivialise the childhood happiness of their daughter and do not meet the expectations of Virmati. They fail to comprehend the need for a healthy

and congenial environment for the holistic personality development of their daughter.

The parental burdens imposed on Virmati shatters her dreams when she was intimidated to compensate her role and identity to suit the constraints of the practice of prejudiced parenting. The hackneyed parenting practice not only deters the capabilities and proficiencies of a girl child, but also affects her intellectual growth to a great extent.

Manju Kapur vividly underlines the fact that Kasturi's treatment of Virmati, highlights the bitter truth of the patriarchal society where the child is made to regret that she is born a female by gender.

Manju Kapur portrays the diverse practices of parenting by comparing Kasturi with her co-sister, Lajwanti, who is a liberal mother, in the same Arya Samaj family. Lajwanti and her husband, Chander Prakash do not fail in their duties to teach their children about the familial norms and traditions. Their permissive style of parenting helps their children, Shakuntala and Somnath to understand the reason behind following the moral values, paving the way to build a healthy and harmonious familial environment. They treat their daughter, Shakuntala on par with their son, Somnath, spend quality time with their children, and understand their feelings, yearnings, and desires. Shakuntala, unlike Virmati, is given the opportunity to decide upon her life choices to pursue her education and procure a career.

Shakuntala plants "...the seeds of aspiration in Virmati" to get rid of the mental trauma and find "...satisfaction... in being independent" and self-reliant (DD 17,19). She makes Virmati understand and realise the significance of women's personal growth and development in the patriarchal family and society. Virmati gains optimism when she converses with Shakuntala, who motivates Virmati saying that, "*Arre*, times are

changing, and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?" (DD 18). She comprehends the efforts of Shakuntala to change her life, but fears that she would be reprimanded, if she tries to break away from parental dictates and familial boundaries. Her trepidations and hesitation to acknowledge her choices, interests, and passion, block her path to individualism.

The childhood experiences and the relationship with parents have an impact on Virmati when she becomes a mother. Virmati reviews the parenting practices of her mother, Kasturi, and aunt, Lajwanti before stepping into the journey of motherhood when her husband fails to contribute in raising her daughter, Ida. Virmati, as a sensible mother, does not adopt her parents' negative behaviours in fostering her daughter, Ida, instead, like Lajwanti, she chooses to be permissive in her parenting. She provides Ida with quality education, makes her daughter enjoy the blissfulness of infancy, and teaches her to be independent. She inculcates feminine gender roles and grooms her daughter to be a responsible and a mature child. She wishes to be a copious mother in educating her daughter about the significance of womanhood and maintains a healthy rapport that was missing in the relationship with her mother, Kasturi. She moulds her daughter into an ideal woman and maintains the connectedness in the mother-daughter relationship with a realisation that the euphoria of their bond would be strained if the authoritarian parenting cycle repeats.

The affiliation between parents and children is fraught with challenges to meet societal and familial prerequisites as Indian parents exercise an excessive degree of authority over their daughters. The educated and archaic parents of Astha, in the novel, *A Married Woman*, raise their daughter in compliance with the Indian patrilineal ideologies.

Sita, the overprotective mother of Astha, restricts her daughter from playing or socialising with the neighbours to safeguard the child from sexual abuse and societal violence. Susheela Kaushik in the book, *Family and Rights of Girls* (1993) opines that,

While schools, friends, media and other agencies play a considerable role...(socialization), the family environment, values and goals are the most formidable influence of all. Much of these aspirations, capabilities and achievements of the girls are encouraged or discouraged by those values and processes of socialization within the families. (166)

Sita involves her daughter in prayers and spirituality to inculcate the religious beliefs and trains the child to get accustomed to the norms of familial integrity and value orientations. She tutors her daughter to be docile and prefers Astha to be dependent rather than to be autonomous. Astha, as a child, finds it difficult to comprehend the traditional familial customs and adheres to the high parental expectations.

The parents consider their daughter's marriage to be a primary parental obligation because Astha is "...her parents' only child. She was their future, their hope... Her education, her character, her health, her marriage, these were their burdens" (AMW 1). Education for Astha is considered to be a criterion to procure an educated groom from a wealthy family. The educational qualification of the bride and the groom plays a major role in the Indian marriage market. Astha's father opines that, "If she did well in her exams, she could perhaps sit for the IAS, and find a good husband..." (AMW 3). He feels that higher education is a valuable way to enrich the marriage prospects of Astha. Sita tells her daughter that, "When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be

condemned to perpetual rebirth?” (AMW 1). The strong cultural stress on the importance of female chastity is the major reason that pressurise young Indian women like Astha to get married at an early age.

Astha becomes impatient to cope with parental coercion and the utmost emphasis laid upon marriage buries the potential and aspirations to establish her identity as an artist. She is disappointed of her mother’s reproach – “...You can’t be drawing and painting all the time ...there was no future in art” (AMW 3). Her dreams are given the least priority and denied the opportunity to experiment with life on her own terms. She feels caged within the norms of high parental pressure and becomes reluctant when her parents fail to respect her opinions and choices. She stands forlorn to find a way out to empower herself as there is no ray of light for a better future.

The parents of Astha ought to have had an understanding of their daughter’s sheer resolution to spread her wings of independence which would have helped to foster her inner strength to be proficient and competent. They fail to sympathise with the psychological turmoil of Astha, and their stipulations have not only hindered her growth and learning, but it makes her feel unloved and takes a toll on her physical and mental well-being. The parent-daughter relationship becomes ambivalent due to the authoritarian parenting practice and deprivation of autonomy to the girl child. The parent-child relationship ends in detachment as Astha loses her proximity with her parents when their expectations do not align with her aspirations and dream goals.

Astha, on attainment of motherhood, wishes to be cordial in fostering her children and adopts the practice of permissive parenting. She is left alone to parent her children due to her husband’s constant business trips. Nurturing her son, Himanshu and daughter,

Anuradha "...made her feel that she had partaken of the archetypal experiences marked out for the female race" (AMW 69). She inculcates familial values and tells her children that, "It is not Papa's or mine... but for everybody. We are a family with growing needs" (AMW 228). She navigates the lives of her children and meet their personal needs in such a way that it instils a sense of responsibility, making them dutiful members of the family. She is an unbiased mother and treats her children with equality. She teaches her children to respect each other, irrespective of their age and gender, as it all starts at home, which would create a realm of equal rights and opportunities for Himanshu and Anuradha in the family and the outside world. She sets no boundaries or expectations that curtail the privileges and aspirations of her children, only to ensure them with an exuberant childhood.

Astha is an affectionate and supportive mother, who values the views and attitude of her children and assists them to build their self-esteem. Her guidance contributes to cognitive development of her children and it helps them to enhance their emotional intelligence and social competence. She avoids asserting authority over her children, and instead provides them with comfort, affection, and a safe space to express their thoughts and feelings. She prepares Himanshu and Anuradha to live a self-governing life moulding them to be confident and reliable. The mother-child attachment between Astha and her children fosters a sense of safety, security, and trust in their relationship.

Nisha, the protagonist of the novel, *Home*, is raised in the conventional joint family of Banwarilals. Her parents, Yashpal and Sona are authoritarian in their upbringing of children and abide by the Indian patriarchal norms that celebrate the birth of male heirs. They revere their son, Raju, and nephews Vicky, Ajay, and Vijay, but

nurture their only daughter, Nisha under conservative conditions with a discriminatory perspective, which leads to detachment and dissociation in the parent-daughter relationship. Nisha is unhappy, angry, and feels isolated due to the parents' comparison between herself and her brothers in the family.

The parents detain their daughter from exploring the world beyond and "...when the child should be thinking of studies, she [mother] was forcing her to think of husbands" (*Home* 95). They inadvertently instil the patriarchal idea that the first and foremost duty of a woman is to serve her husband, children, and take care of the household chores; the child, "...stayed home from school to learn how to be a good wife" (*Home* 92). They do not create a conducive world for Nisha; instead weave a complex web that entangles their daughter to restrain herself from access to education which tramples the aspirations and dreams of the child.

Nisha is portrayed as a rebellious child when she demands to be treated on par with her brothers to pursue education and establish a career. She despises her parents' treatment and believes that marriage is not the ultimate goal of a woman's life. She aspires to become an entrepreneur and discloses to her father that she has the professional skills to establish her own business venture and must be involved in the family business along with her brothers. The career-oriented obligations of Nisha and her opportunities to be a part of the ancestral business are not welcomed by her parents, but she emphasises that, "I have seen girls working in shops. Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do" (*Home* 267).

The attempts of Nisha to assert and attain her identity as a businesswoman are presumed to be a violation of the family hierarchy. Her father is of the standpoint that

entrepreneurial pursuits are considered to be desirable only for male children. Yashpal perceives Nisha to be an asset of her husband's family and the societal norms comprehend that, "... a girl who, despite the overuse of her brains, was only going to get married" (*Home* 121). He also professes that inclusion of Nisha in the family business would end in dilemma and he would neither be able to consider her to be an active business partner nor can he split the profit or the proprietorship, which may create family politics after his daughter's marriage due to the detraction of her relationship with the parental home.

The determination of Nisha to be an entrepreneur is also opposed by her mother, who warns her daughter not to seek freedom outside the limits of Indian socio-cultural and familial norms. Sona ponders over the fact that women have to deal with the ambiguities of combining familial and professional roles in a society which often looks down upon women's resolution to be independent. She is aware of the unfavourable conditions of the pronounced cultural and gender biases that affect the ecosystem of entrepreneurship creating challenges for women in the business forum. She fears that the achievements of Nisha and the establishment of her identity as an entrepreneur may go unrecognised due to the lack of family support. Nisha protests against her parents and becomes resilient to the biased parenting practices of Yashpal and Sona which militate against the welfare of their daughter.

The torments of Nisha are taken into consideration by her aunt, Rupa, and her uncle, Premnath, who pacify the child not to lose hope and give up her dreams to be an entrepreneur. They opt to raise the child with their permissive parental nurturance to transcend the dejected mindset of Nisha. They object to the idea that life of Nisha should

not be restricted to marriage and motherhood. Nisha is fostered with affection and benevolence under the guardianship of her aunt and uncle. The childless couple, Rupa and Premnath, soothes their childlessness through the entry of Nisha, who becomes the centre of their interest, concern, and attention. They motivate and render their support toward the fulfillment of her intellectual and emotional needs.

Nisha, at her aunt's home, recuperates in an atmosphere very different from that of her parental house and finds herself in a happy, healthy, and congenial family environment. Her uncle helps to strengthen her capabilities and equips her with wisdom and knowledge besides helping the child to develop the personality traits like self-integrity and nobility. She engages herself in recreational activities that delight her creative mindset and with the thirst for knowledge, she excels in her academics. She is free to express her desires as she finds it comfortable to approach her aunt and uncle without the fear of being criticised or blamed and is allowed to be the best version of herself. The encouragement, love, patience, and acceptance from the aunt and uncle transform Nisha into a confident child. A shift in the parenting paradigm motivates Nisha to envision an optimistic life. Manju Kapur enunciates that childhood nurturance and experiences have an impact on shaping the child's character. The authoritarian parents, who impose stringent rules and stand against the desires of Nisha, make her stern and obstinate while the permissive nurturance of her uncle-aunt adds credentials to the child's development to be independent, poised, and successful.

Nisha, when she becomes a mother of the fraternal twin children, decides to be the replica of her aunt and uncle to nurture them. She renders emotional support and is responsive to her children's growing needs, passions, and desires. She does not pressurise

or compel her children to confine themselves within the familial boundaries, instead, gives them the opportunity to explore their aspirations and dream goals. She never forgets to indoctrinate the values of the conventional principles and familial customs through her affable teachings as a mother.

Motherhood strikes to be tough and challenging in a single-parent family. Nina's mother, Shanti, and Shagun's mother, Mrs Sabharwal succumb to widowhood and they experience single parenthood in the novels, *The Immigrant* and *Custody* respectively. The widowed mothers deal with the grief of losing their husbands and at the same time maintain good parenting, as the sole providers and care-givers to their daughters. Despite the lack of social and familial support, the mothers, struggle to manage the domestic obligations and financial burdens, to foster their daughters with unrestrained love, care, and attention. They maintain a right state of mind, build a comfortable life, and a perfectly happy home to ensure that the growth, progress, and development of their daughters are not affected.

The mothers, who are authoritative in their parenting, consistently set limits, enforce boundaries, and teach moral values for the well-being of their daughters. They become mentors and role models to feed their daughters with positivity, strength, and determination to progress in life regardless of the challenges and failures. They place high value on their daughters' education and career prospects with an understanding and realisation about the need for women's financial independence. They guide their daughters to become self-reliant children and envisage them to be virtuous. Their resilience and perseverance, as a single parent, to fulfil the physical, emotional, and materialistic needs of Nina and Shagun instil a sense of confidence in their daughters.

The journey of single parenthood become fruitful and beautiful when Nina and Shagun raise up to the expectations of their mothers and excel to be valorous children. Nina and Shagun relish their childhood with the right degree of independence that disciplines them to be children with morality and conformity. They realise the agonies of their empathetic mothers, Shanti and Mrs Sabharwal and feel indebted to reciprocate the gratitude for the sacrifices rendered to ensure the welfare of the daughters. They strive hard to soar high with good academic excellence and wish to uplift their role from being a daughter to a bread-winner of their family to ease the physical and financial burdens that are levied upon their mothers.

Shanti and Mrs Sabharwal become typical Indian mothers when they sow the thoughts of marriage in their daughters' minds when Nina and Shagun attain their marriageable age. They feel that, if the lives of Nina and Shagun are settled in the hands of suitable and high-profile grooms, they would be relieved of their parental duties and can get rid of the worries about fulfilling their responsibilities. They are obsessed to find the best marriage proposals for their daughters because they have to safeguard the girl children from the prying eyes of the society and fight against the illicit approaches of men. They are of the belief that marital bond assures life security, strong support system, and companionship to Nina and Shagun. They want their daughters to enjoy the marital bliss and experience the best possible future.

The parenting duties of Mrs Sabharwal is not just limited to raising her daughter, Shagun, but it extends to her grandchildren. Mrs Sabharwal becomes the reliable childcare support to her daughter Shagun, who is not a stay-at-home mother, but a working woman, juggling single-handedly with household errands and child-rearing

tasks. Her moral support helps to reduce the stress and workload of Shagun to maintain a better work-life balance. She acts as a vigilant co-parent of her grandchildren with a strong sense of responsibility to pass on the family traditions and values to the younger generation.

In the novel, *Custody*, the parents of the protagonist, Ishita, are authoritarian in their parenting and expect their daughter to acquire the feminine traits like humbleness, docility, and modesty in accordance with the cultural norms, gender roles, and societal expectations. She has to lead a life envisioned by her parents which suppresses her aspirations to establish her career identity as a teacher and a social worker. She is either given the opportunity to express her ambition or choose an occupation of her choice. She finds it difficult to satisfy the parental expectations and wishes to live a life free from the dictatorial regime of her parents.

Ishita yearns to be independent, but is discontent with the parental coercion towards marriage and retaliates saying that, “I can look after myself. You think all married women have their husbands caring for them...” (*Custody* 168). She resists to confine herself within the boundaries of marital obligations. She frowns upon the culturally constructed view on marriage which has a stronghold over the lives of women and their desires are deemed to be subservient to that of men. Her opinions are brushed aside and her decision to live a life of her own is not acknowledged by her parents which make the parent-daughter bond to be incompatible.

Ishita, from the hostile experiences in her relationship with her parents, wishes to make her experiences of parenthood to be happy and joyful when she nurtures her husband, Raman’s children, Arjun and Roohi, who are separated from their biological

mother. Initially, the attempts of Ishita to develop a motherly affinity with Arjun and Roohi are met with resentment and challenges, but she overcomes the parenting problems when she creates a comfortable cushion for communication between herself and the children. The trauma of allegiance and separation of the children from their biological mother gradually disappears when they become habituated to the permissive parenting practice of Ishita and her affectionate nurturance. She is unprejudiced in raising the children, who enjoy unconstrained liberty in their childhood and they are given the sovereignty to envisage the life goals of their choice.

Ishita endures to be compassionate and maintains a calm attitude to establish connectedness in her bond with Arjun and Roohi. She recognises them for their excellence not only in their academic endeavours, but also rewards them for their right deeds and actions. She boosts the children's morale and assures that "I am the person who looks after you, sees to your food, makes sure you do your homework, buys you pretty things, who will never leave you, no matter what" which make the children feel safe and freed from emotional devastation (*Custody* 314). The motherly care of Ishita obliterates the unnecessary skepticism from the children's mindset and they accept her as their own mother. The motherly love, care, affection, and guidance of Ishita set the tone of optimism in the parent-child bond.

The parent-daughter relationship in the novel *Brothers*, is friendly and affectionate due to the permissive parental treatment of the protagonist, Tapti Gaina. The parents are unbiased; their elder son, Ram Pratap and their younger daughter are provided with an equal dispensation of opportunities to pursue education and career of their choice. They ensure that the sister-brother bond between Tapti and Ram Pratap promotes

empathy, prosocial behaviour, and academic achievement right from their childhood. The brother is expected to take over the role of parents to provide Tapti with necessary support and guidance for her physical and mental well-being. Ram Pratap becomes a source of moral strength to his sister and performs the fatherly duties after the untimely demise of the father.

The mother, Mrs Ahlawat becomes the pillar of support to her children and she manages to provide them with good quality education. She procures a job in the railways “...on compassionate grounds” upon the death of her husband, which enables her to bear the academic expenses of her children and the financial commitments of her family (*Brothers 27*). Ram Pratap outshines in his academics, establishes his career as a lawyer, and shares the financial burdens of the family along with his mother while his sister, Tapti, also wishes to extend her financial support to the family. The life of Tapti is dismayed when she receives a marriage proposal from a wealthy political family.

Tapti, with the fear of losing her dream to establish her career as a social activist, refuses to marry and expresses her thoughts that, “I too want to do something. Why should I sit around doing nothing just because I am a woman?” (*Brothers 31*). Marriage is a primary Indian societal obligation that manipulates Mrs Ahlawat to be a conventional mother. Mrs Ahlawat feels incompetent about her state of being a widowed mother and persuades Tapti to accept the marriage proposal saying that, “Beta, first comes family, then the outside world...” (*Brothers 31*). She convinces her daughter to marry, aiming to ensure a happy marital life and a secured future for Tapti.

Tapti is left alone to take care of her family after marriage when the role of her husband is limited to being the breadwinner while the responsibilities of parenting and

fulfilling the domestic errands and familial duties rest solely on her shoulders. Her active involvement as a supportive mother in nurturing her daughters, Mridula and Mansi, helps them to become well-educated and determined individuals. Her daughters make her feel proud when they achieve academic excellence and stand up to the expectations of their mother. Her daughters are given the privilege to express themselves and be the decision-makers of their lives. The permissive motherly nurturance attributes an irrefutable definition to the mother-daughter relationship, a bond built on trust, understanding, and the freedom to grow as individuals.

Manju Kapur explicitly brings out the pros and cons of parenting, which is an attachment that goes beyond mere biology, encompassing the physical, emotional, and psychological ties that bind parents and children together. She paints a vivid picture of the Indian parental practices in raising the women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina. The women protagonists are expected to be docile and submissive and forced to acculture themselves to be the replica of their mothers. Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* that, “Sometimes [Mother] tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate: What was good enough for me is good enough for you, I was brought up this way, you shall share my lot” (Beauvoir 533-34).

Indian daughters often face countless restrictions imposed by their parents and society – the kind of work they do, whom they befriend, how they speak, what they wear, whom they love, whom they marry, when they marry, where they live, and how they parent their children. The problem arises when they are unable to fulfil and satisfy the high parental expectancies and demands. The women protagonists expect a change in the attitude of Indian parents to raise the female children to be independent, confident, and

good decision-makers. They anticipate their parents to encourage them to stand by their life choices and promote equality which motivates their children to live in harmony regardless of their gender roles. They emphasise the importance of congenial parent-daughter relationship that would help them to overcome societal barriers and face the challenges of life without the apprehension of embracing vulnerability or humiliation.

The women protagonists, from their childhood experiences and the relationship with their parents, wish to modify the parenting scenario when they become mothers. They impart the values of individualism in their children and provide them with decision-making opportunities that help them to achieve independence and self-reliance. Vidhu Mohan, a psychologist in the article, “Are Marks the Only Mark of a Child?” remarks that, “The first interaction in life is with the parents...Right from birth to many stages of development, the family has to play a vital role. Every individual wants to lead a life of fulfillment and happiness and parents can be the agents for attaining this” (1). Parenting is a process of continuous learning and parents should feel free to seek advice, learn from their mistakes, and grow alongside their children. The act of raising children shapes not only the future of the child, but also the parents.

Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Shagun, Ishita and Tapti Gaina, in their journey of parenting, adapt themselves to the changing needs of their children and teach them to be compassionate and resilient. Being mothers, the women protagonists strive to establish equal opportunities for both their sons and daughters within the family, to address and eliminate the gender disparities through friendly nurturance and unbiased parenting. They encourage them to develop their unique artistic and academic skills to prove their strengths and establish their identities while respecting the diversity of every individual in

the society. They wish to establish contentment in the parent-child bond through appreciation, reward, and recognition of their child's moral code of conduct, skills, and talents.

Manju Kapur mirrors the fact that parenting is influenced by cultural and ethnic values in the Indian social structure. She rejects the parental pressures that compel Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina to compromise their education, career, or individual life goals only to meet the societal expectations like marriage and motherhood. The educational empowerment of girl children and women enhances positive parenting, and helps them impart the right kind of virtues on their family and society. Manju Kapur opines that, what is expected of tomorrow's children should first be planted in the girls and women of today, as they are the teachers of the upcoming generation. She wants the parents to feel proud of the fact that education and empowerment of their daughters not only fulfils her self-intellectual needs, but also fortifies her family, society, and the entire nation.

Manju Kapur feels that, it is in the hands of the parents to ensure protection, promotion, nourishment, and proper environment which help their children grow into useful and responsible citizens to serve the nation. Children of today cannot emerge to be responsible citizens of tomorrow unless the parenting approach and the family environment are poised with love, guidance, discipline, open communication, and a strong foundation of moral values. They are the potential human resources for social progress and stability, peace and order, and economic empowerment. Parents have to focus on the reciprocity of love and mutual understanding in the parent-child interaction, emphasise the privileges of their child irrespective of gender, and believe in the impact of

empathic richness in the parent-child bond for comprehensive development of their children. Manju Kapur emphasises that parental upbringing and the values instilled in children pave the way for the development of a civilised society, shaping the moral compass, social behaviour, and ethical foundation of its future citizens.