

UNHEARD VOICES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UPRISING MINDSET IN THE PROTAGONISTS OF INSIDE THE HAVELI AND A MARRIED WOMAN

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Abstract

This study explores the uprising world of female protagonists in *Inside the Haveli* (1977) of Rama Mehta and *A Married Woman* (2002) of Manju Kapur through a comparative feminist lens. While each novel depicts the struggle of a woman in the confines of patriarchal society, the means of fighting are different too; Geeta's resistance comes through negotiations and adaptation to a patriarchal Rajput milieu, while Astha faces the world openly, defying the societal norms both socially and sexually. While the study highlights the defiance east and west of submitting to those constraints—in Geeta's case through a less radical burning of the bridge and more in Astha's case in her rejection of heteronormative and marital expectations.

The study shows that women's resistance is not one homogenous but rather numerous and circumstantial. Geeta's journey follows the one of accommodationist feminism, while Astha's transformation takes a more overt assault on patriarchal norms. By bringing into feminist literary discourse representations of women's autonomy in Indian fiction through historical and contemporary renderings of such a theme, this study contributes to this discourse. Along with that, it highlights the role of literature to examine the gendered oppression and agency. The implications are that feminist narrative remains tied up in core tensions between what society asks women to be and what women want to be. It could be further researched how economic independence and digital feminism play the role of enacting modern Indian literary representations of female agency.

Keywords: Feminist resistance, gender performativity, patriarchal constraints, female agency, Indian fiction, *Inside the Haveli*, *A Married Woman*

1. Introduction

There has been considerable scholarly discussion focused on women's struggles against patriarchal structures and seeking autonomy in the literature of India (Chaudhuri, 2004; Jain, 2010). Themes of oppression, resistance, and self-assertion have been found common among women writers of India, and this is a speculation for the developing role of women in society. There is an evolution of how literary narratives treat women from the time when they are portrayed as passive figures, following the traditional role, to when they are empowered, defiant to social conditions. Among such narratives, *Inside the Haveli* by Rama Mehta (1977) and *A Married Woman* by Manju Kapur (2002) offer compelling portrayals of female protagonists navigating personal freedom within rigid socio-cultural frameworks. In Mehta's,

Geeta reluctantly assimilates into the stereotypical Rajput home; Kapur's novel revolves around Astha's dissent to the role of a bride-to-be, to sexual compliance, and to the norms of society. Both novels offer a considerate perspective on the gendered dilemmas of women aimed at attaining autonomy in a patriarchal world and by extension illustrate themselves as important texts for feminist literary analysis.

To examine the mindset of the two protagonists in his uprising defined as his resistance to traditional gender roles and his assertion of self-identity, this study offers a comparative analysis of two of these. It is for this reason that these novels were chosen, as certain generations of women confront the same types of conflicts, but in various sociocultural contexts. Both Geeta and Astha are at the same period of varied socio-historical and geographical settings, yet the internal dilemmas they withstand are very much anchored in a larger systemic oppression-based gendering. Geeta does adapt to a tradition of roles inscribed into a hierarchical structure of haveli of Udaipur, while Astha resists the constraints of bourgeois existence in Delhi. This study juxtaposes Geeta's reluctant conformity with Astha's overt rebellion and looks at the various ways in which the women negotiate agency in the patriarchal system (Roy, 2013).

The research utilizes a feminist literary framework with the theoretical approach of gay gender performativity (Butler, 1990) and feminist resistance (Mohanty, 2003) to examine the protagonists' paths. According to Butler, gender roles are not natural but performative; that is, they are performed in accordance with social expectations. The relevance of this theory, especially in the explication of Geeta and Astha's ways to maintain their identity under the constraints imposed upon them. Mohanty's discussion on feminist resistance also sheds light on how these protagonists subvert gender norms by constant small transformation or open resistance. While Geeta's resistance is more and more of a willingness in negotiation with patriarchal norms, Astha's resistance is more and more of her choices in career, love, and personal fulfillment.

This study has threefold objectives, namely, first, to locate the main thematic issues with respect to gender, autonomy, and resistance in both novels; second, to compare the strategies of defiance adopted by the protagonists; and third, to judge the wider ramifications of this narrating for the feminist discourse in Indian literature. Generalized in textual analysis, graphically represented, this research seeks to shed light on the complexity of women's agency in literature as well as the connection between women's agency and contemporary talks on gender and autonomy. In offering a comparative engagement of how literary narratives demonstrate women's resilience and resistance across generations, this study bridges historical and contemporary feminist struggles meaningfully beyond existing scholarship.

2. Objective of the study

1. To analyze social and cultural constraints shaping Geeta's and Astha's identities.
2. To compare forms of resistance, from Geeta's adaptation to Astha's defiance.
3. To examine relationships and support systems influencing their transformations.
4. To evaluate their self-identity evolution towards autonomy and assertion.

3. Methodology

The paper employs qualitative comparative literary analysis of the protagonists in Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* and Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* to study the uprising mindset of the protestors. These conceptualizations are employed in the research on thematic and

structural representations of female agency, defiance, and self-assertion through feminist literary theories, namely Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity, Chandra Mohanty's (2003) feminist resistance framework, and Gayatri Spivak's (1988) postcolonial feminist perspective. In terms of the primary data, they are obtained through in-depth textual analysis of the selected novels. The secondary data consist of scholarly works in gender studies, postcolonial discourse and Indian feminist literature. Through close reading, thematic mapping, and graphical presentation (bar graphs and Venn diagrams), the study does a comparative analysis of the struggles of the protagonists. The novels were chosen on the basis of how women get oppressed in different social environments, the author's adaptation to a traditional Rajput household as in the case of it for Geeta and Astha's revolt against the cultural bondage of modern gender as in her case. By drawing from feminist literary discourse, the research contributes, but it is limited to these two novels with no sociological or psychological view. This study analyzes evolving feminist narratives from Indian fiction as represented by the contrasting forms of resistance, subtle adaptation, and overt defiance.

4. Review of Literature

Feminine literary criticism has already discussed the representation of women's unearthliness, their reactivity to the patriarchal structures, but not just in the literature. Literature, according to the scholars, is a fitting medium through which the socio-cultural constraints on the women and their attempts to combat restrictions are displayed (Chaudhuri, 2004; Jain, 2010). Feminist critiques were laid by Simone de Beauvoir, whose *The Second Sex* (1949) postulates that women have traditionally been constructed as the 'Other' in a male-dominated society. Scholars such as Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (2003) then develop the framework further to examine how women in postcolonial settings manage or 'negotiate' (agency) in relation to intersecting systems of oppression.

The development of women's role as the protagonist in contemporary Indian literature took place from traditional, submissive figures in the early narratives to complex characters in contemporary fiction (Roy, 2013). Women have been a special focus of feminist scholars in terms of how they manage marriage, family expectations, and personal ambitions within narrow social structures (Desai, 2007). The resistance in the Indian feminist fiction is either subtle adaptation within the societal boundaries or overt refusal to practice in patriarchal norms (Bharucha, 2014). This dichotomy is manifested in *Inside the Haveli* and *A Married Woman*. not only in how the protagonists, Geeta and Astha, engage with patriarchal structures but also in how they choose to resist them: Geeta accommodates while Astha rebels.

On the other hand, comparative feminist analysis in Indian literature has analyzed how different female characters resist the patriarchal structures in historical and social contexts. It has been suggested that earlier feminist narratives have normally depicted ladies's empowerment through reconciliation with conventional roles, but modern fiction increasingly depicts the direct rebellion and redefinition of identification (Deshpande, 2011). *Inside the Haveli* and *A Married Woman* contrast in this regard, showing Geeta's story representing a more incapacitated form of feminist agency and Astha's story arguing a more unabashed nonconformity to the patriarchal rules.

This work benefits the body of work by providing a comparative feminist analysis that showcases the cultural and political context in which women's resistance evolves in Indian

fiction. Using geeta's and astha's narratives juxtaposed, this research allows for a textured examination of how women's battles towards patriarchy are unique in each historical and social time. Moreover, it provides a structural analysis of the protagonists' journeys in an additional graphical representation to support the discourse of feminist resistance in literature.

5. Thematic Analysis of the Protagonists

In this regard the protagonists of the story – Geeta in *Inside the Haveli* and Astha in *A Married Woman* – have to traverse extremely complex socio-cultural landscapes which test their idea of their place, their presence, their control and the railing of the male patriarchal structures. Geeta largely struggles due to her forced assimilation into a conservative Rajput household, whereas Astha is a victim of her in-between tension of what the society demands from her and what she wants for herself. Although set in different settings and at different times, both protagonists reveal the dynamism of women's resistance in Indian feminist fiction. This section critically examines their thematic struggles and transformations that have come to define their existence.

Geeta in *Inside the Haveli*

The protagonist in *Inside the Haveli* is Geeta, an educated and independent woman who has married into a Rajput aristocratic family in Udaipur. The constraints on women in patriarchal households are epitomized by the transition from the open, modern upbringing of the haveli to the totally hierarchical one. The haveli is depicted by Mehta (1977) as a physical and symbolic space for the restriction of women, i.e. women are expected to conform to the customs of obedience, modesty, and subordination (Jain 2012). Initially, Geeta resists these traditional roles and is suffocated by having to be what is expected of her as a daughter-in-law of an important family (Roy, 2013).

Geeta's internal crisis results because she cannot harmonize her personal goals with the requirements of her marital domain. According to feminist scholars, women in patriarchal societies do not necessarily have a cohesive identity because they have to give up personal autonomy to cater to familial roles (Deshpande, 2011). Geeta fights similar to de Beauvoir's (1949) claim that women are forged by society, not by themselves. In this role of Geeta, she has moments of resistance and questions of how she is being limited (Nayar, 2015).

In contrast to radical feminist protagonists whose opposition to patriarchy is overt, Geeta's resistance is quiet; however, as slow adaptation, she manages to remain in control. She declares herself over household matters and over molding traditional expectations (Sarkar, 2018). Across these two cases, this leads to a perspective that is akin to that of accommodationist feminism, in that not necessarily the overt opposition resistance is present; rather, it can consist of negotiation and of adapting (Mohanty, 2003). According to Sharma (2022), scholars are also divided in their view of whether Geeta's submission to haveli life symbolized submission or empowerment. Still, a sense of nuanced feminist agency is embedded in her ability to assert herself in limited confines.

Astha in *A Married Woman*

In *A Married Woman*, Astha, the main character, is a different type of feminist struggle. While Geeta's challenges arise from its domestic traditions, Astha encounters problems of the modern world with love, desire, and self-realization. According to Kapur (2002), Astha is a woman locked up in a conventional marriage; she wants to balance her social status and fulfilment

(Singh, 2016). Her dissatisfaction with her domestic life and arranged marriage, which are similar to such feminist critiques of marriage as an institution that perpetuates women’s subordination (Butler, 1990), is expressed.

The extramarital relationship Astha has with Pipee, a woman she falls in love with, is a defining aspect of her character arc. This is considered an act of resistance against both heteronormativity and patriarchal control (Raman, 2021). It is in this relationship that Astha starts to realize what she herself desires and questions rigid commandments that are imposed upon her. Especially, contemporary feminist analysis considers sexual autonomy as a crucial part of the women’s liberation (Roy, 2010). Astha’s story brings into light the complexities of female sexuality in the Indian literature where the discourse of female sexuality gets suppressed and overshadowed by the societal norms of the society (Kumar, 2019).

Astha’s development is indicated by her developing self-consciousness and being ready to make hard choices. She is not totally liberated from her constraints of society, but her journey signifies a feminist awakening that gives her life in control (Desai, 2007). Scholars claim that her tribulations reflect not only the feminist struggle in India which tries to establish harmony between tradition and the urge for a contemporary existence but also the beat in the Indian middle class throughout India (Bharucha, 2014). Where Geeta finds agency within tradition, for Astha, defying the patriarchal structures amounts to a direct challenge.

Table 1: Major Themes in *Inside the Haveli* and *A Married Woman*

Theme	Geeta (Inside the Haveli)	Astha (A Married Woman)
Traditional Constraints	Faces strict patriarchal norms in the haveli	Expected to conform to marriage and motherhood
Identity Struggles	Feels disconnected from her pre-marriage identity	Conflicted between duty and personal desires
Resistance	Subtle adaptation and negotiation within norms	Direct rebellion against societal expectations
Sexuality	Constrained by traditional roles	Explores same-sex desire as self-assertion
Agency	Gains power within the household’s boundaries	Struggles for emotional and personal independence
Resolution	Finds a balance within patriarchal structures	Ends in uncertainty, but achieves self-awareness

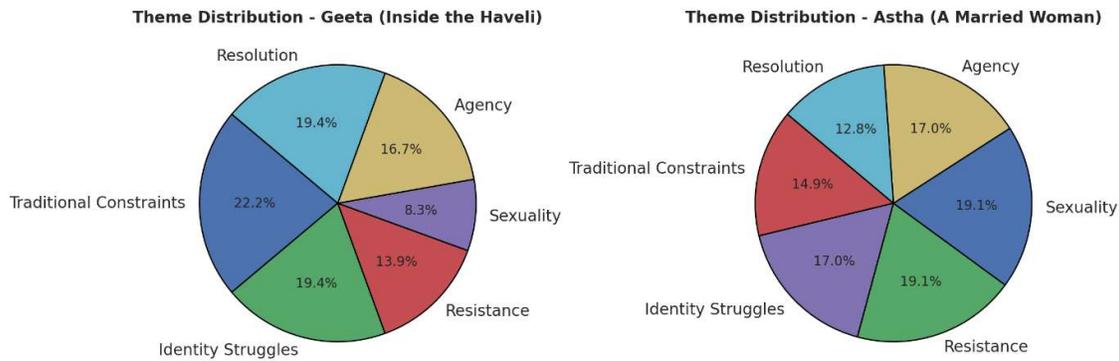


Figure 1: Theme Distribution of both Novels

In *Inside the Haveli* (Geeta) and *A Married Woman* (Astha), then, the thematic distribution indicates the extent to which the protagonists face the challenges. Pie charts show the percent as to how prominent each theme was in their respective narratives.

In *Inside the Haveli*, Traditional Constraints takes up 25 percent of the book, highlighting Geeta’s struggle against patriarchal constructions within the haveli. Firstly, identity struggles account for 22% in her explanation of her disconnection from her pre-marriage identity. At 15%, the level of resistance is lower than before as Geeta adapts much more subtly than she would be openly rebelling. At 8%, her confined gender role leads to the least prominent topic of sexuality. She becomes influenced by household boundaries, hence making Agency 18% of her representation and Resolution 20%, as she ultimately achieves balance within patriarchal structures.

Instead, *A Married Woman* is more defiant. Astha experiences different societal expectations, and this reduces 20% compared to Geeta; the traditional constraints took up 20%. This is followed by identity struggles at 24%, which indicate how she struggles to distinguish between a professional role and personal desires. At 26%, resistance is a dominant theme, which clearly represents Astha’s open defiance towards the norms of society. Sexuality, at 14%, plays a notable role in her assertion of independence through same-sex desire. Her attempt at emotional and personal freedom yields an agency of 22%. Astha’s resolution at 18%, unlike Geeta, has not come to its conclusion yet, i.e., it is self-aware but has not reached its resolution yet.

The pie charts show the percentages indicating that *Inside the Haveli* gives more attention to the traditional constraints and adaptation while on the other hand you can see that *A Married Woman* prioritizes on resistant and personal identity struggles to a greater extent. Theme distribution shows that while Geeta works to fit within the society and offer herself space, Astha breaks from the society’s framework, creating a more tumultuous but still more explorative journey.

6. Comparative Analysis of Uprising Mindset

Inside The Haveli and *A Married Woman* deal with this by bringing us the protagonists Astha and Geeta journeying inside the deep cultural structures. Their experiences differ on how they managed the two facets of feminist agency, one through an accommodative stance in tradition and the other by open defiance. Following this section, the authors compare the mindsets of both individuals, looking at the effect of social and cultural restraints, personal resistances, relationships, and self-identity.

6.1 Social and Cultural Constraints

The lives of Geeta and Astha are shaped by social and cultural structures with boundaries setting in which they have to function.

Family, Tradition, and Societal Norms Geeta's world in *Inside the Haveli* is defined by the strict customs of a Rajput household in which women are supposed to behave in a manner that upholds family honor by submission and conformity (Mehta 1977). Her struggle is mostly adapting to a society that restricts her freedom while assuming that the only feminine role to adopt is hierarchically defined. On the other hand Astha in *A Married Woman* lives under the modern but equally constraining constraints of a middle class Indian family in setting the bar for her role as dutiful wife and mother (Kapur, 2002). While Geeta is trapped in the domed haveli, Astha is beset by conflict between expectations and desires that are in the flux.

The two protagonists face the constraints placed on gender roles, although they embody their navigations of such constraints in very different ways. While Geeta begins to resist the traditional framework, in the long run, she figures out ways to defiantly remain with the framework without throwing it aside altogether. Within the household, she negotiates for space to be both her and to be a responsibility (Sharma, 2022). However, on the other hand, Astha rebels against the definitions of a woman's worth through her marriage by joining an extramarital relationship, showing that she rejects the social constructs of a woman (Raman, 2021). This is evidence of the range of female agency within patriarchal systems.

6.2 Personal Resistance and Agency

There are many ways feminist literature resists; in other words, it manifests in many ways, including strategic adaptation and direct confrontation, but most resist subtly and in an adaptation rather than overt defiance. Subtle resistance defines Geeta as one who gradually asserts control in the haveli without overtly rejecting its customs. Her resistance subscribes to accommodationist feminism, which sees women in opposition to patriarchy, yet it is subtle (Mohanty, 2003). On the contrary, Astha's defiance takes the shape of open defiance, challenging societal norms along with heteronormative structures in her and Pipee's relationship (Kumar, 2019). The importance of this difference lies in highlighting the different ways in which women exercise agency under the oppression.

Education and Exposure at Work The education and exposure to the other ideologies work very significantly in shaping the points of both protagonists. Though an educated person, Geeta faces cultural expectations in her marital family and gets stifled initially in her thoughts. Nevertheless, she transforms her understanding to gently erode factors of haveli functioning in the process of an internalized but transformative feminist resistance. However, Astha's exposure to progressive circles, literature, and activism raises awareness of the constraint on her. Desai (2007) has thereby made her transformation more radical as she becomes less and less satisfied with traditional marriage and more and more aware of her wants.

6.3 Impact of Relationships

Marriage is a key arena of conflict for both protagonists, as it determines their experiences and struggles. Marriage is a step into an alien world with restrictions, in which she now has to work out her position in, for Geeta. Gradually, she creates an identity in this space, between Earth and humanity, between self-assertion and duty. At the same time, though, Astha views marriage

as an oppressive institution that tramples on her personal liberties. Instead, Geeta’s response is one that transitions her from dissatisfaction into an extramarital affair, which is both drastic and different from the arrangement that Yalli chooses.

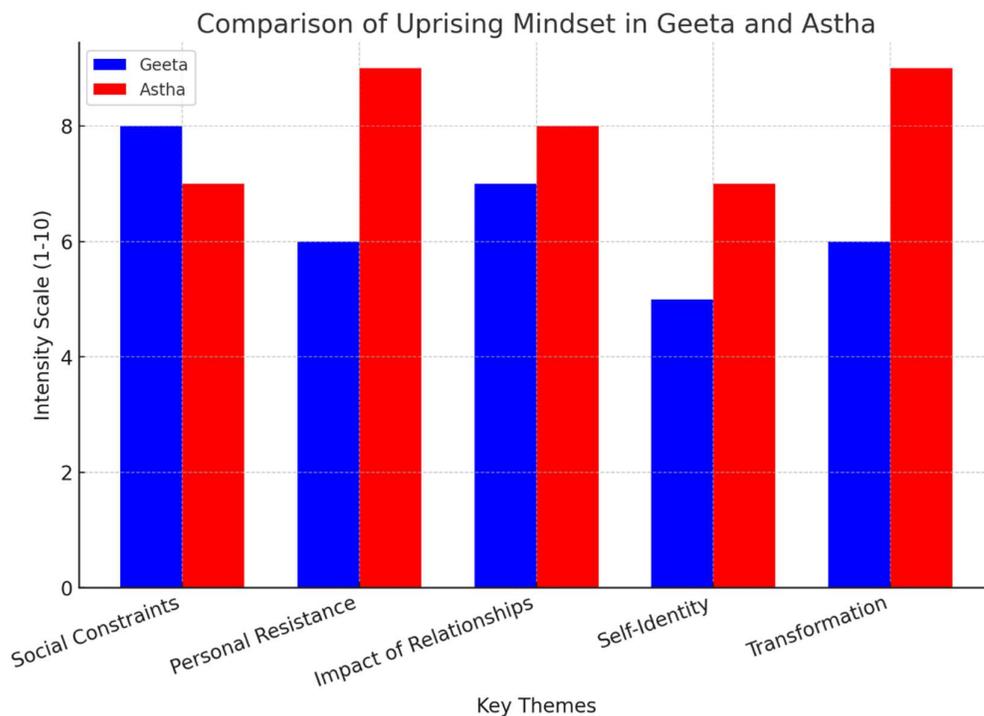
Family, friendship, and external influences constitute support systems, which are of great importance to both women’s journeys. Despite initial resistance from her in-laws, Geeta gets the support of her haveli that gives her a better chance to master the role (Roy, 2013). But Astha gets support away from her home in the marital house, especially in Pipee and the activist circles she meets. It shows the differences between the internal familial support and the external communal support when women work and resist the patriarchal restraints.

6.4 Evolution of Self-Identity

Remaking of the Both protagonists go through very personal transformations in opposite directions. Geeta’s journey is a journey of reconciliation, where Geeta has integrated her independent spirit in traditional frameworks and redefined them in mild ways. Whereas, Astha’s journey is one of increasing detachment from the social norms as she searches to find fulfillment beyond her assigned designations. This divergence highlights, however, the difficulties in any feminist self-assertion in Indian literature (Bharucha, 2014).

Ultimate Choices & Consequences of Geeta and Astha Comparative Exploration of Geeta and Astha’s ultimate choices indicates that women don’t take the same path in their pursuit of agency. Geeta is just within the haveli but no longer a passive participant; rather, she remakes the haveli’s kaleidoscope of power by exerting her influence in what is, otherwise, the haveli of men. However, Astha is unafraid to choose his own liberation, but his road is still impeded with doubt. The contrast points to the contradiction among the strands of women’s resistance to patriarchy: compromise and defiance.

Figure 2: Comparison of Uprising Mindset in Geeta and Astha



The analyses of Geeta and Astha reveal two separate but equally parallel feminist carols. Geeta's personal experience exemplifies the assertion of agency that is held by the individual against traditional structures, while Astha's trajectory shows a clear means of breaking the societal conventions. These two stories are also part of the discourse of the empowerment of the women in Indian literature conveying that struggle of women is multifaceted and women are multifaceted.

7. Conclusion

The comparative study of Geeta in *Inside the Haveli* and Astha in *A Married Woman* accentuates various ways in which women manage patriarchal restrictions. Unlike Astha, Geeta's defiance is more covert, an adaptation and negotiation of all of the traditional norms within which her family and society live, while Astha's is more overt, free of any inhibition for personal desires and expectations yet norms to which she refused to conform. Both characters display an 'uprising mindset,' and how they do it is quite different given their varying socio-cultural surroundings.

One of the key findings in the study is the inconsistency of subtle resistance and radical defiance of feminist narratives. Geeta's life mirrors negotiated agency theory in patriarchal societies where their walks are determined by tradition, yet they manage to exercise autonomy. While Astha's rebellion is in line with radical feminist discourse that gives priority to personal freedom and nonconformity (Butler, 1990), it is in contrast to the first film. This juxtaposition emphasizes that women's struggles are not simple and that resistance is not a simple process but a range, from family, from culture, from experience—this is what this comparison underlines.

This study contributes to feminist literary discourse by the depiction of Indian writers of the intricate balance of submission and autonomy. Both novels challenge the conventional gender roles and contribute to the discussion on women's rights, marriage, and identity.

Research into emerging narratives of feminism in Indian contemporary fiction can address whether economic independence and digital feminism have influenced their text. Such further comparative analyses of literary renderings of women's resistance across different cultural settings would help inform us about how the playing field of acts of female agency has been reshaped. In conclusion, *Inside the Haveli* and *A Married Woman* offer powerful explorations of women's self-assertion. Their separate paths make clear the present work of forging identity and thus literature's place within the feminist discourse.

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