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**‘QUEST FOR IDENTITY’ BY “HER”
IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR
- Difficult Daughters, and A Married Woman**

YASHIKA CHANDNA

PhD Scholar, JNU,

Assistant Prof. Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University



ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study new women in the novels of Manju Kapur so taking in account the complexity of life, different histories, culture and different structure of values, the woman's question, despite basic solidarity, needs to be tackled in relation to socio- cultural situation. Women under patriarchal pressure and control are subjected to, too, much more bunts and social ostracism. They are more discriminated and biased in lieu of their sex. The live and struggle under oppressive mechanism of closed society is very much reflected in her writings. We see budding new women in her novels who are not puppets in hands of others, but someone who try to assert and carve their own identity in this all man's world.

Key words: Gender, Identity ,Social Rebel, Indian fiction

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In almost all cultures and civilizations, woman is at the centre of life with her creative wisdom and myriad forms for her female angst. She has experiences of being patronized, bypassed and ignored. Her feminine psyche has to cope with the pain, rather than privilege, of performing different roles in a male dominated society. In the midst of gender based relationship, tradition vs. modernity, love and friction, sexual exploitation, domestic chores, demands of children, experiences at workplace, and her own menstrual cycle, she also seeks space to exert her womanhood, femininity, and identity¹.

Women right to celebrate their womanhood; they sing women's dream and speak their bodies. For as long as women did not write they were not heard. Women's writing then, is like raising consciousness. Their writing impacts their very existence in the socio cultural milieu as it expedites their shift from marginal position to a central one. Literature is impacted by reality, but its corollary, that reality is molded by literature, is also true. The Indian literary scene, dominated by men as active forces, always had a gap-it told the story of half humanity through the voices of the other half. In a country where even the political power in hands of rural and urban and uneducated women is used by their men, it becomes very significant to explore the changes brought about in the literary scene by women writers. The shift from women as seen and projected by men to women as lived and experienced by women was most welcome.

In its nascent stage, Indian English fiction had men writers who focused on a man's world where the presence of woman was only incidental. Women appear in their fiction only as a necessary tool to be used by men. There were few writers like R.K. Narayan or Mulk Raj Anand who bothered to take up some secondary women characters, but the depiction was not authentic: (a) men did not have access to the insides of a house which was the only space women moved in; (b) only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches and these shoes were certainly not worn by men; and, (c) however sensitive these writers may have been they still did not consider woman's life as exciting enough to become apt material for fiction. There were writers who chose women protagonists, but their portrayal of them was too romanticized to compare with the real life woman. The suffering wife, the weeping widow, or the sacrificing mothers were the only images found in fiction. In these novels the Sita, pativara image of women found acceptance, and submissiveness, was still considered a virtue. There was no room for a woman who was not virtuous. Women either upheld conservative ideals or they were labeled immoral. Traditional moral aesthetics dominated these narrativesⁱⁱ.

A close look at the women novelists of Indian English fiction may draw one's attention towards certain interesting facts. Almost all women novelists write from their personal experiences; almost all of them end up in one or other form of feminism. Some of them give us their autobiography in fiction and all virtually identify with their female characters.

The purpose of this paper is to study new women in the novels of Manju Kapur so taking in account the complexity of life, different histories, culture and different structure of values, the woman's question, despite basic solidarity, needs to be tackled in relation to socio-cultural situation. Women under patriarchal pressure and control are subjected to, too, much more bunts and social ostracism. They are more discriminated and biased in lieu of their sex. The live and struggle under oppressive mechanism of closed society is very much reflected in her writings. We see budding new women in her novels who are not puppets in hands of others, but someone who try to assert and carve their own identity in this all man's world. Her writing reflects the experience of women in real world. Who is not a perfect or a quintessential woman! She writes about personal experiences, problems, spaces and identity crises. She writes what today's women can easily relate to and can see her novels as an extension of their own life. She deals with intermingling spaces of traditional and modernist ethos, women trying to grapple with it to find their identity. Her writing steadily and firmly argue for the values like freedom of thought and expression, liberation from oppression and marginalization, and equality as a quest for dignity are prime moves of her imagination and creativity.

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. Manju Kapur's novels create a space where the issue of woman and modernity can be discussed openly. But still there is angst that prevails throughout the novels regarding social and gender construct that arise as result of modernity. Her writing in 1998, Manju Kapur, in her novels presents women who try to establish their own identity. The women of India have indeed achieved their success in half a century of Independence, but if there is to be a true female, independence, much remains to be done. The fight for autonomy remains unfinished combat in her quest for identity.

'*Difficult Daughters*' is the story of a young woman named Virmati born in Amritsar into an austere and high minded household. The story tells how she is torn between familial duties, the desire for education and elicit love affair. She is the central character of the novel, rebels against tradition and is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. The title of the novel '*Difficult Daughters*' is an indication to the message that a woman, who tries to search her identity, is labeled as difficult by the family as well as society.

This is a story of sorrow, love and, compromise. The major portion deals with Virmati's love affair with Professor and rest of the part describes her struggle for realization of her own independent identity. During this period Virmati develops a deep relation with professor, meanwhile she also clears her FA and denies for marriage and take education as refuge to evade her marriage and to carry her relation with

professor. Due to rising conflict in her mind regarding her relationship status she tries to commit suicide but is saved by her grandfather's servants.

Everybody inquires the reason for such behavior and finally she declares that she does not like the boy and wants to study further. So marriage is settled with Indumati, the second daughter. But this very act creates a rift between her and her mother, though they never shared a congenial relationship. Virmati gets herself an admission in RSBL college, Lahore and principal assures Kasturi, her mother, that there will be no problem and she has her eye fixed firmly on each one. Sakuntala, a cousin, who has been a source of inspiration for Virmati, visits her regularly. It is here that Virmati tastes the sense of freedom and during this period professor resurfaces. A relationship that got estranged due to professor's wife's pregnancy. Virmati looks at it as breach of trust. But due to persistent pestering of professor Virmati once again reconciliates and even gets pregnant. She becomes restless and with the help of her roommate Swarnlata she gets an abortion and professor is oblivious of all this. This makes Virmati think about her position in professor's life which seems nothing more than a pleasure seeking toy and thus distance herself from him.

Completing her B.T. she returns to Amritsar and is offered the principal ship of a college, in Nahan, which she takes as an opportunity to move away from her past. But here too Harish visits her and their meetings are observed by Lalaji which leads to her expulsion. After this she decides to go to Shantiniketan but on the way she meets Harish's close friend poet who is already aware of their intimate relationship. As soon as she gets to know about Virmati's plan he calls Harish and asks him to come to Delhi. He comes at once and on Virmati's resolute gets married to her. During her conjugal life Virmati feels that it would have been better if she had not married Harish. As their marriage was not seen in a positive light neither by her family and nor by professor's. After being married also she felt incomplete as she was not allowed to fulfill her duties as a homemaker which made her feel deficient. In between she had a miscarriage which made her more irritable. To escape from all this family politics Professor sends her to Lahore for further studies but she had to return due to tension caused by partition of India. Professor and Virmati shift their base to Delhi, where she gives birth to a daughter Ida and at the beginning of the novel it is Ida who ponders over her mother's life reconstructs it.

Virmati had to fight against the power of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy symbolized by the mother figure. The rebel in Virmati might have actually exchanged one kind of slavery for another.

But towards the end she becomes free, even from the oppressive love of her husband. In her another novel '*A Married Woman*' Manju Kapur has taken writing as a protest, a way of mapping from a point of view of a woman's experience. Kapur negotiates different issues emerging out of a socio political upheaval in her country. In a realistic way, she has described the Indian male perception of woman as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history and those in power trying to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes. *A Married Woman* is the story of Astha, an educated, upper middle class, working Delhi woman. As a girl she has been brought up in a way a girl is expected in a patriarchal construct; fearful, vulnerable and unprotected. She was her parents' only child. Her education, character, health, marriage were her parent's major concerns. But like every teenage girl her dreams were full of romantic fantasies. She dreamt of tall, dark and handsome guy walking directly out of Mills and Boons novels. In her adolescence she falls in love with a boy of her age. Day and night she kept thinking of him, which kept her insides churning. But her romantic fairy tale ended as soon as her mother got to know about it. After this her mother chaperoned her closely. But as she entered prime of her youth in her college days she got emotionally and physically engaged to Rohan. For her, he was the physical realization of her dreams. But for Rohan, Astha was just a pleasure seeking commodity and this relationship ended soon as Rohan moved to Oxford for further studies. Her mother is oblivious of any of these developments in her daughter's life in spite of her focused attention. On the other hand her mother is primarily focused on pivotal parental obligation of getting her married. In her search for groom Astha's family zeroes in on Hemant, belonging to a well-to-do bureaucrat family. The marital bliss for Astha ends soon and she starts feeling entrapped and bored. To get rid of this boredom Astha starts teaching in a public school after much resistance from her husband and her parents. During her stay in this school she participates in a workshop on communalism led by an intellectual artist Aijaz Akhtar Khan, the founder of 'The Street Theater Group'. Aijaz teaches educational theatre and during the holidays he performs plays in school,

slums, factories, streets small town and villages to create empathy and to generate social awareness. Although Astha and been a mother of a son and a daughter by this time. She is fascinated by multifaceted personality of Aijaz. But soon her infatuation gets over as the workshop ends. After few days Astha reads the news of Aijaz's assignation which deeply moves her. This all takes place in the backdrop of Babri masjid demolition and Hindu Muslim riots. There is a lot of turmoil throughout the country which even simmers Astha's consciousness.

To establish religious harmony and social integration processions are organized by 'The Street Theatre Group'. In one such procession Astha happens to participate where she meets Peeplika, who turns out to be Aijaz's widow. She feels empathetic towards her, liking for same person and Peeplika's free and assertive nature draws Astha towards her. In Peeplika she finds her true companion and an intimate emotional and physical relationship sprouts between them. This leads Astha on verge of losing her conventional marriage. But her relationship fails to see the full bloom as Peeplika leaves India to study abroad and Astha returns to her family. This is a beautiful, honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment set at a time of political and religious turmoil. The sectarian conflict that dogs the subcontinent provides the backdrop to both the novels.

In *Difficult Daughters*, her first novel so called another woman is trying to find a place for herself in a world where her life is dictated by familial duty becomes embroiled in a forbidden affair while seismic upheavals of the partition surrounds her. In *A Married Woman*, the struggle to gain control of the disputed Ayodhya temple side- a struggle which even persists today, years after 1992 destruction of Babri mosque- parallels Astha's emotional turmoil.

All the novels explore the difficulties of reconciling the devotion to family expected of middle class Indian women with their aspirations and desire for a life outside. As she said "I am interested in the lives of women whether in the political arena or in domestic spaces. One of the main preoccupation in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both the inner and outer spaces in their lives- what sacrifices do they make in order to keep the home burning – and at what cost to their personal lives, do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the homeⁱⁱⁱ.

Manju Kapur's novels present the changing image of women; moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring women, self sacrificing women towards self assured, assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands and in this way providing a medium of self expression. "One is not born but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature"(Beauvoir, Simon, 1949, *The Second Sex*)

A non-descript term; identity suggests our thoughts and feelings, our psychic presence, our place of habitation, and even our longings, dreams and desires. The individual identity, like the national identity, is formed through a series of random and frequently bizarre accretions. In the formation of individual identity, several factors come into play. One is the cumulative offspring of all these diverse and divisive forces.

A formative and not an innate product, one's identity is determined by three factors. Firstly, childhood impressions and aspirations play a vital role in deciding it.

An individual has to break off most of her reliance on her parents, and become three enough to leave home and develop ideas and aims of her own which will give her distinct identity. How strong the rebelliousness in each individual is, and what form it takes, is the second element in determining identity. The third element is the Zeitgeist. These call on the youth to develop different qualities in different historical periods.

Identity is the projection of the self .Self image moulds and transforms self identity. One's identity is rooted in the culture in which one lives, and hence alienation from the culture loss of one's socio-cultural identity. The urge to identify with present stimulates one in the quest of identity, which operates at public and private levels. The individual's alienation from the society is the manifestation of her quest for assertion of her identity. Things otherwise taken for granted appear bewilderingly paradoxical when we seek a rationale behind them. It is this urge to discover rational in the transitivity of the objects around us that leads the alienated self in its quest for identity^{iv}.

Identity- A psychological perspective:

A psychological identity relates to self- image (a person's mental model of himself or herself), self esteem, and individuality. An important part of identity in psychology is gender identity, as this dictates to a significant degree how an individual views himself or herself both as a person and in relation to other people, ideas and nature. In cognitive psychology, the term 'identity' refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self. Components of identity include a sense of personal continuity and of uniqueness from other people. In addition to carving out a personal identity based on their membership in various groups- familial, ethnic, occupational, and others. These group identities, in addition to satisfying the need of affiliation, help people define themselves in the eyes of both others and themselves.

J. E. Marcia identified four common ways in which adolescents deal with the challenge of identity formation. Those who experience, confront, and resolve the identity crisis are referred to as "identity-achieved." Others, termed "identity-foreclosed," make commitments (often conventional ones, identical or similar to those of their parents) without questioning them or investigating alternatives. Those who are in "identity- diffused state shrink from making defining choices about their future and remain arrested, unable to make whole- hearted commitments to careers, values, or another person. In contrast, those in the 'moratorium' group, while unable make such commitments, struggle to find their identity through experiencing unresolved crisis. Firstly state of diffusion was related to adolescents only later it was discovered that it can occur at any stage of life.

Identity- a sociological perspective:

Anthropologists have most frequently employed the term 'identity' to refer the idea of selfhood based on uniqueness and individuality which makes a person distinct from others. Identity became of more interest to anthropologists with emergence of modern concerns regarding ethnicity and social movements in 1970s. This was reinforced by an appreciation, following the trend in sociological thought, of the manner in which the individual is affected by and contributes to overall social context. Until recently it has been used largely in socio- historical way to refer to qualities of sameness in relation to person's connection to others and to a particular group of people.

This ambiguous and confusing approach to identity has led on occasion to rather restrictive interpretations of the concept; following two more or less opposite tendencies the first favors a primordial's approach which takes the sense of self and belonging to a collective group as a fixed thing. Defined by objective criteria, such as common ancestry and biological characteristics. The second, rooted in social constructionist theory, takes the view that identity is formed by a predominantly political choice of certain characteristics. In so doing, it questions the idea that identity is a natural given, characterized by fixed, supposedly objective criteria. Both approaches need to be understood in their respective political and historical contexts, characterized by debate on issues of class, race and ethnicity. While they have been criticized, they continue to exert an influence on approaches to the conceptualization of identity today. These different explorations of 'identity' demonstrate how difficult a concept it is to pin down. Since identity is a virtual thing, it is impossible to define it empirically. Discussions of identity use the term with different meanings, from fundamental and abiding sameness, to fluidity, contingency, negotiated and so on. Brubaker and Cooper note a tendency in many scholars to confuse identity as a category of practice and as a category of analysis. Indeed, many scholars demonstrate a tendency to follow their own preconceptions of identity, following more or less the frameworks listed above, rather than taking into account the mechanisms by which the concept is crystallized as reality. In this environment, some analysts, such as Brubaker and Cooper, have suggested doing away with the concept completely. Others, by contrast, have sought to introduce alternative concepts in an attempt to capture the dynamic and fluid qualities of human social self-expression. Hall (1992, 1996), for example, suggests treating identity as a process, to take into account the reality of diverse and ever changing social experience. Some scholars have introduced the idea of identification, whereby identity is perceived as made up of different components that are 'identified' and interpreted by individuals. The construction of an individual sense of self is achieved by personal choices regarding who and what to associate with. Such approaches are liberating in their recognition of the role of the individual in social interaction and the construction of identity. Identity is made evident through use of markers such as language, dress, behavior

and choice of space. The theme of identity is often expressed in novels/books or any piece of literature so that reader gets fascinated, relate to characters and their emotions. It is useful in helping readers understand that a person's state of mind is full of arduous thoughts about who they are and what they want to be.

Identity of Women:

The feminine gender identity is an enquiry into the multiplicity of cultural practices particularly of discourse and representation in relation to power. It is a postmodern paradigm or anti- paradigm. It is self assertion which is grounded in experience of inability, deprivation, disability and disadvantaged.

Indian women's identity is one that is usually connected to and denied by the societal and cultural norms of a particular familial structure. This identity is denied within the parameters of their social relationship to men. They are traditional conservative, and therefore they are reluctant to cross the 'Laxman rekha' of their family and culture. They are regarded as preserver of essential nationalist spirit. They are to smile always, welcome their guest and entertain them, care for their family performing all household duties and if there is any pain, they are to hide it behind their veil. They are to become true symbol of Indian tradition and culture. Thus, Indian women become a metaphor for purity, chastity and sanctity of the ancient spirit that is in India. The national construct of Indian women attributes to the spiritual qualities of self sacrifice, devotion, and religiosity and so on. Consequently anything that threatens to dilute this model of Indian womanhood, constitutes a betrayal of all that^v.

It is believed that Indian women in general do not have identity of their own. They belong to their male counterparts, before marriage they belong to their father after the marriage to their husband. In old age they are at mercy of their sons. But now with changing times they are trying to establish a new identity by reformulating gender roles. They are moving beyond the stereotyped image of being docile, naïve, dependent, and submissive.

Women asserting their identity in Manju Kapur's Novels:

The Indian woman is caught in flux of tradition and modernity saddled with burden of the past to cast off her aspirations. In the novels of Kapur the women goes through transitional phase where they become different from traditional women and want to tread new paths. The modern woman does not find any sense in such self-sacrifice and yearns for self-expression, individuality, and self identity. A woman is never regarded as a autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and a relative position. "Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without a man"(Simon de Beauvoir,1949, *The Second Sex*)

Difficult Daughters- Virmati's quest for identity:

Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* is termed as difficult because she rebelled and defied the age old norms of patriarchal construct. She is the eldest daughter in the family and because of this she is drawn into household drudgery.

As a perfect female archetype of daughter she accepts her role without any questions. Although from within she felt stifled but never raised voice as it would have been a deviance on her behalf. At this time she was already engaged to canal engineer Inderjeet. She had even accepted it as her fate, when professor's wife enquires about her marriage in the beginning when they had just made an acquaintance she said 'Well...' blushed Virmati. 'My family found ' I agreed in fact I would have been married by now, but then my grandmother, great aunty really, died now we will have to wait...'(DD 41). However seeds of aspiration are planted in Virmati when she sees Shakantula, her cousin tasting "'wine of freedom.'" She secretly nurtures the desire of being independent and leading a life of her own .She wanted her life to go beyond mundane business of looking after husband and procreating. She knew if wanted to be free she needs to look outside the family as her mother was epitome of traditional women in patriarchal construct. Who looked at education as evil force? When Virmati showed her desire to study Kasturi retaliated and said 'Leave your studies if it is going to make you bad tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first.'(DD 21). She had to fight with her to assert herself and it was education at first she used as tool to achieve her identity. In this combat against the ascribed role she not only clears her FA exams but also enters A.S college,, "the bastion of

male learning'(DD 45). She asserted herself not only through education but also through her choice of groom. It was during her years in A.S College that she develops feelings for Harish, professor in college and a tenant at her place. This was a match that everybody would have envied otherwise but it became most unsuitable choice in case of Virmati; as professor was already married.

In a way she had an illicit relationship with him for she even bore the confinement. This relationship even leads her to commit suicide as she was not able to define her position neither in her family and nor in professor's. Here she is moving from foreclosed identity; where everything was defined for her by her family to moratorium where she was to search for her own identity. This conflict rises in her mind as somewhere she felt cheated, professor being not loyal to her. A man professing his love for her on one hand and making his wife pregnant on other cannot be apparently dependable. At this juncture, decisively and brusquely she cuts him saying that "you think you can do what you like so long as you go on saying you love"(DD 105). It was during her confinement that she tried to find her, self, in 'Virmati'.

She says: "my fate is cast, and I am free now. I feel far more peaceful in the godown than I did in the days before I went to river. Then, the confusion in my mind was terrible. I could not think, and all I heard around me was talk of marriage. I was rubber doll for others to move as they willed, then I did not want to live."(DD 92). These were the words which defined her state of mind and her will to move freely and carve her own identity. Defied patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, she asserts her individuality and inspires self reliance through education. She is not a silent rebel, but bold, outspoken, determined, and action oriented. She knows she cannot depend on professor to sort out the domestic situation and proceeds to tackle it on her own. Later, she very decisively and coolly shunts the professor, ignoring his plea and keeps the reins in her hand. She displays marvelous strength of mind in overcoming her rejection. 'She is strong to bear the pain, silently without anyone knowing.'(DD 109). The determined and the unperturbed manner in which she burns the professor's letter show her resolution to close the chapter and look forward to a meaningful life Lahore. In spite of all her rebel against her family she again lands up in another patriarchal construct created by Harish. It is here that she succumbs to her passion and sexual pleasure losing her modesty. It is loss of virginity which pricks her consciousness.

According to feminist perspective this sexual act of Virmati can be regarded as her freedom and assertion of choice. She transgresses the social boundaries according to her will, but this landed her up in pregnancy out of wedlock; but pregnancy is burden that only woman has to bore so can choice be regarded as independent. 'She had come to Lahore to broaden her horizons but instead she gets involved in useless love doubtful marriage and unwed pregnancy The initial tenacious and assertive self gradually disappears into words of professor he is the one who guided her and all her actions in a way controlled her ideologically. The time when she wanted professor to be on her side that was while she got an abortion he was out of the whole picture. She alone gets herself under the knife to get rid of the shame that her independence has caused her. 'Yes she was independent. Her body has gone through knives and abortions ...' (DD 175) she spends her time in frequent meetings with professor that to knowingly of being used, as professor never commits to marry her.

The most constructive period in Virmati's life was at Nahan where she led her life like a free bird without anything to worry about. She works as a headmistress which gave her economical independence; it is here she gains greatest degree of control over her life. She earns respect; all the responsibilities were to be delineated by her. This gave new meaning to her life. In the micro state where her actions lead her she has no family or friends, but she attains exemplary level of self autonomy. For the first time she has her own place to live. But the societal construct makes her feel incomplete, as there was no man in her life which leads her steps towards the biggest blunder of her life; she returns to professor and ends herself in a moribund life governed by patriarchy.

A Married Woman- Astha's Quest for identity:

The married woman Astha questions the established norms to search her identity. Astha who has been brought up in all conservative and a protective environment ends up in the most turbulent times in search of herself. Astha's assertion of identity was mostly depicted through choice of her partners. In adolescence itself she has tasted the sense of freedom by being with Rohan. Being in a relationship that too physically intimate in nature, is an outward act of disregard of social conventions. She asserted her choice by

refusing to meet her suitors, her mother had selected. 'I am not coming' she shouted... 'I cannot meet anyone like this.' But in due course of time as she is abandoned by Rohan she gives to her parents demand (foreclosed identity) and marries Hemant. Who at first seemed to be a guy with open outlook, western thoughts and ideologies but turns out to be a loyal member of chauvinistic Indian male bandwagon. Astha enters her marriage with certain apprehensions but gradually gets lost in marital bliss and physical pleasure. 'A few months and dullness began to taint Astha's new life'. (MW 46) It was now she started feeling disillusioned her life lacked a sense of purpose. As days passed waiting for Hemant and fantasizing her with him. After lot of thinking she plans to join school fits the bill of marriage perfectly, a half day job so had enough time to look after household chores. Her impression that "with good job comes independence"(MW4) comes to force. She gives birth to a daughter and a son but disapproves any discrimination made by her in-laws regarding children on bases of gender. She is surprised at the reaction of the family and society when they remain cipheric of Anuradha's birth but gets an overwhelming approval of motherhood after the birth of Himanshu. In her feminist assertion Astha does not appreciate superstition, sex- subjugation and pride and prejudice of having children just for their discriminated sex in the Indian perception, being "caught in web daily life"(MW 84) she develops restlessness stress and anxiety. She tries to find her expression self through poems, but that were also subjected Hemant's scrutiny. Astha poured her feelings out in her poetry to which Hemant coldly disregarded. Her poetry reflected the conflict in her mind which Hemant refused to acknowledge. She wrote:

Change

The eventual release of pain

In the tearing restless separation....darkness grows silently.

To hide me in the Break of day (MW80-81)

'You don't like them?'...Astha asked (MW 81)

"What kind of emotions? This person sounds positively neurotic" (MW 81)

"If others read these poems, they might actually think you weren't happy" (MW81)

Hemant's response left Astha totally disheartened and she gives up writing poetry the only refute she had to her disposal.

Astha doesn't leave her quest here, she finds her expression in painting. Her paintings gave her the vent to be herself and form separate identity from her husband and family. This arena was opened to her by Aijaz, an intellectual theatre person who comes to take workshop in school during summer vacation. Astha's repeated search for a conformation discloses her lack of confidence and even reflects her upbringing where she had to look for approval for everything from the patriarch of the family. But later after Aijaz's death she joins manch for the cause of communal violence and this was her first independent decision which marked the turn of her life. This decision of her wasn't really approved by Hemant in an admonishing tone he said "please. Keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching. All this doesn't suits you."(MW116).

Hemant detested Astha's involvement with manch and tried to emotionally maneuver her in the name children and familial duties. Even her mother-in-law looked at this disapprovingly and told her woman's place is within the confines of house not on the roads and politics in not a field where woman should participate. "Her mother-in-law looked at her.'It is not a woman's place to think of these things', she said firmly." (MW186). In spite of her family's disapproval she carried on with her activities and even went to Ayodhya for Yatra. It was their abomination, which made Astha more determined. Astha asserts herself by not succumbing to her husband's demands and even through economic independence. This was one of the major reasons which pumped Astha with confidence. She was well aware of economics of power and money, Hemant asserted his control because all the finances were under his control and she was dependent on him. This is the reality of most Indian women they have to live and bear the atrocities caused by their husbands they don't have any other means of survival. Even Astha's mother didn't give money to her, rather trusted Hemant with it; this attitude reverberates the age old notion that women are not to be involved in money matters. "Your mother gave me money to manage, I didn't ask for it',said Hemant coldly. " she trusts me even if you don't"- making a sarcastic remark on Astha. At a point of time Hemant even asked Astha to leave her job under the guise of ill health, but it seems quite possible that he was insecure of Astha's growing independence. But it was not just for money that she wanted to paint it gave her life. To her 'it represented security, not

perhaps of money, but her own life, of a place where she could be herself (MW 149). In spite being economically independent Astha is not able to do things for herself. The trip to Goa that family takes was sponsored by Astha's money and it Hemant's decision to squander that money on air tickets. But on the same trip when Astha asks for a certain box she is denied and when Astha retaliates by saying, that, "I also earn; Can't I buy a box if I want, even if it is a little overpriced?" You earn', Hemant snorted.' What you earn that is really something, yes, that will pay for this holiday' (MW 165).this satirical tone of Hemant reflects his outlook toward Astha's economic independence he sees it in a derogatory manner and this view of Hemant changes drastically when Astha's paintings are sold for lakhs. This shows how money changes the perspective of people around you. The amount of money you earn decides your position in the family and becomes your social case marker.

"Astha asserts herself by asking for a separate space to paint this very act of hers defines her identity. This demand of hers is seen as opulence and not a requirement. Having space of one's own is definitely the biggest assertion in the spatial sense. Hemant even comments the space that she possesses would be the source of envy for many women. That's not all through which Astha defines herself the ultimate identity marker comes in form of Peeplika her choice of beloved. This was the most gregarious choice to asset one's identity she out does all the societal norms of heterosexuality by choosing a lesbian partner. She not only had emotionally satisfying relation but the ultimate physical fantasies were also realized. She was so satisfied with Peeplika that sex with Hemant just became mundane activity. This was same Hemant she longed for, in the initial days of her conjugal life. With Peeplika she was her complete self and it even made her realize many facets of her relationship with Hemant which reflected power than love.Astha's slow discovery of her differences with her husband, her change from tender and hopeful bride to battered wife and her meeting with Peeplika makes her realize the other state of woman in their 'familiar distress' (MW 188). 'This is the reason which leads her to an immoral, rather amoral, guilt consciousness of lesbian love rationalizing her outmoded morality'^{ix}.

Astha questions the established norms to search for her identity she had led a life of sacrifice and adjustments but it failed. She had longed to have her husband who would appreciate her, but now as a matured woman she had other expectation from herself and not others. As she continues to paint, she feels more confident. Astha's conflict between oppressive patriarchal culture and her imagination and sensibility is sorted out through the independence she gains by taking decisions for herself.

Presence of an ideal to look up to:

Both the novels had women who were identity achievers and had set an example for the protagonists who were in state of identity diffusion. In case of *Virmati* it was Swarnlata and Shakuntla who showed her path of independent identity. She wanted to spread her wings like Swarnlata who was woman with free spirit and independent in all sense of the word. She innately desired to be like Swarna but could not be as she was entangled in worldly love of Professor. Swarna, the new woman who made her presence felt in society by being part of various political movements and even continued to do the same after marriage. Ida, daughter of *Virmati* was also deeply influenced by Swarna as she considered her as a complete woman who led her life on her own terms.In a similar manner Astha, the protagonist of *A Married Woman* who looked upto Peeplika a woman who was liberated and had carved a place for herself well within the patriarchal construct of the society. A woman who lived alone, asserted her choice by marrying Muslim against choice of her family and society. Even after her husband's death she carried on with her mission without any apprehensions. She was a woman who never needed a man to tell her what she wants she was to do or support her. This was Peeplika's assertion of Independence which attracted Aastha towards her

Identity at a glance- Conclusion

A detailed study of Manju Kapur's novels reveals that her women in her novels are of ultra modern era who wants their individual worth to be realized. *Difficult Daughters*(1998) recounts the story of a young woman called *Virmati*, her desire to study, her rejection of her arranged marriage, her entanglement with married neighbor the 'Professor', whose second wife she becomes, and her subsequent challenging and difficult life choices and their ambivalent outcomes marks the stages of development from identity crisis to identity achievement. Manju Kapur's second novel, *A Married Woman*' (2002) explores the life of Aastha from

her young adulthood through her early middle years. In the process she marries, discovers the joys of intimacy with her husband, grows distant from him, struggles to become a painter, becomes a social activist, falls in love with a woman, and finds herself- sort of, more or less, almost.

Although the conflict for autonomy and separate identity remains an unfinished combat. When she expresses some aspirations as man do she is labeled as a feminist. Though rebellion demands determination and will to stand by the cause of rebellion at any cost, the heroines in the novels of Manju Kapur have often come up by paying price for their rebellion. This is the irony of Kapur's women. There comes a transitional phase in their life and they tend to become different from traditional woman and want to break out in new paths. However, the change is more theoretical in nature. When it comes to reality after boldness to themselves they lack courage and resume to patriarchal hegemony. What happens to Virmati and Astha is no doubt the more representative destiny of Indian women even if educated. Commenting on this issue Anita Desai rightly observes, "the conterminous constraints of widespread illiteracy and material dependence" make Indian woman themselves "connive at patriarchal morals" "a secret convenience".

Notes:

- I. Dasan,A.S, "the feminine psyche and the Indian English Novels Now", *The rains and the roots ,the Indian English novels then and now*,Sahrdyaya,2006,(101)
- II. ¹ Choubey, A, "From silence to speech: An Assessment of Indian English Fiction By Women" Half yearly literary journal ,2003.
- III. Interview by Lindsay Preira published at website rediff.com<http://in.rediff.com/news/2006/jun/07/spec1.htm>
- IV. Swain,S.P, 'Random thoughts about identity',*Self and Identity in Indian Fiction*,Prestige, 2005.
- V. Chandra,N.D.R, 'Identity,Culture and theory: Towards Feminine Gender Representations' , '*Critical Response to Indian Fiction in English*,Ed.Prasad,A ,Atlantic Publication,2007.
- VI. Kapur,M,*Difficult Daughters*, U.K,Faber and Faber,1998(subsequent references from this book are marked as DD followed by page number)
- VII. Malik,S, 'Crossing Patriarchal Threshold :glimpses of the Incipient new woman in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*' ,Ed.Dhawan, '*Indian Women Writers*', Prestige ,2001.
- VIII. Kapur, M,*A Married Woman*, Indian Ink, 2002(subsequent references from this book are marked as MW followed by the page number.
- IX. Sharma,R, 'Feminist Visions in the Novels of Manju Kapur' <http://www.contentwriter.in/article/book-reviews/novels-Manju.Kapur.htm>>
- X. Malik, S, " Tradition, Transition and Modernity: The changing Image of women in Manju Kapur's Novels <http://www.indianwriters.org/haryana/mamta.bhtanagar.htm>
- XI. Desai,A, Introduction , *Sunlight on Broken Column*, Attia Hussain, New Delhi: Penguin, 1992 v-xv

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