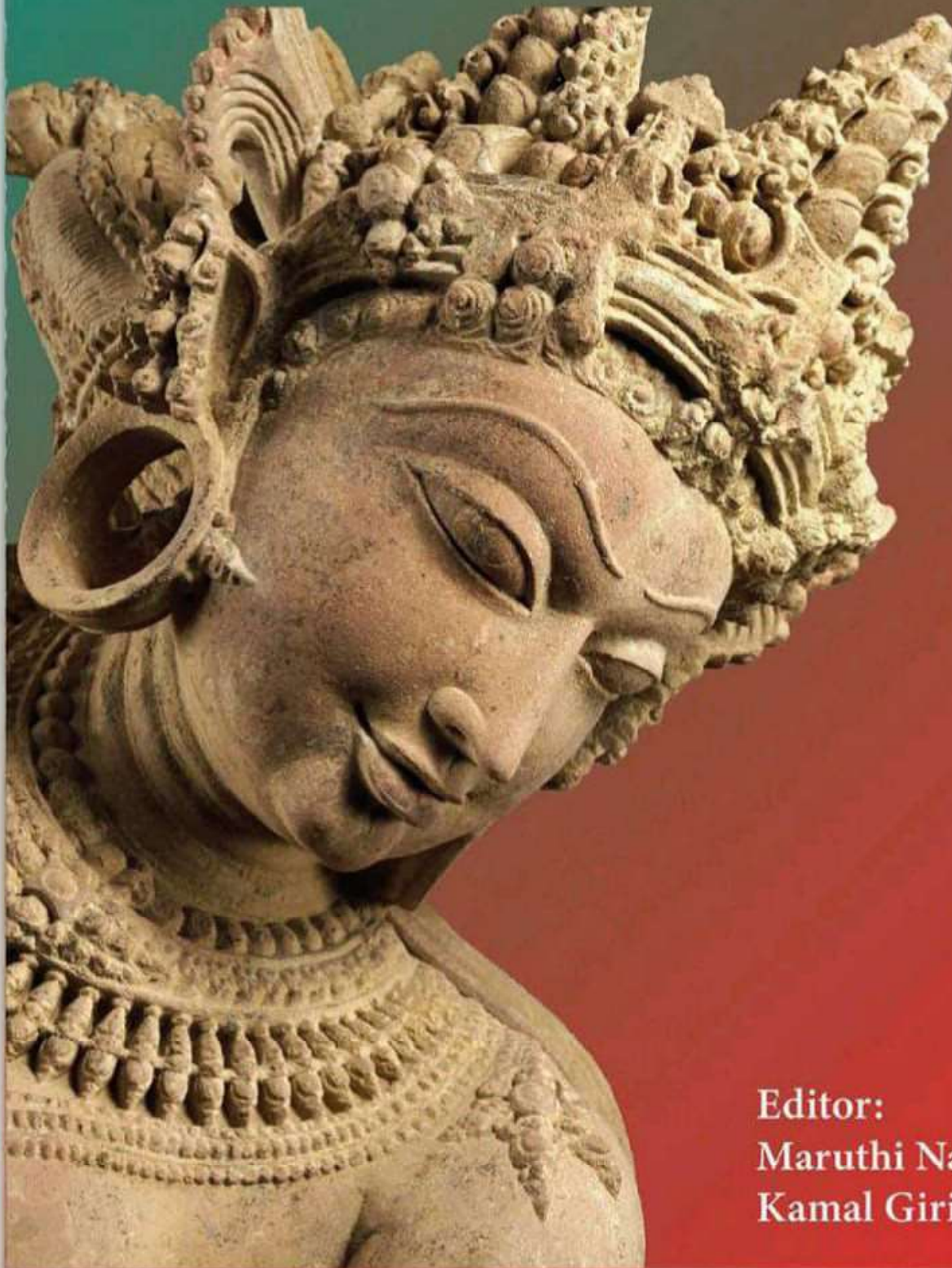


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**19. “Women’s quest for Identity” in reference of Manju Kapur’ novels
Difficult Daughters and Married Woman**

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Abstract

Indian women writing in English is being recognized and all we know that the Indian literature has its own significance. There are different languages, culture and life style in India. There are some movements that have deeply affected each of the regional Indian literatures. The fact is that Indian literatures are a product of multicultural and socio-historical mixture and this fact cannot be overlooked. Now Indian literature reached at the highest point of creation with the contribution of some great writers of regional and national fame. Indian women writers like Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, and Shobha De have given a new direction and dimension to Indian writing in English. Their women stress the important of female assertion. Their characters suggest revolutionary changes are easier to carry not to sustain. In this run of struggle for identity, the protagonists face all the alteration of family life.

Keywords- significance, multicultural, socio-historical, dimension, assertion, revolutionary, sustain, alteration.

Indian writing in English has an independent existence in the history of English literature. In the field of Indian novels women writers constitute a significant place in English. Women’s effort to seek their independence and self-identity started a revolution all over the world. Anita Nair is one such writer who portrays realistic female characters in her works. A woman’s identity crisis is that where she struggles to achieve as a human being in its full sense against those forces of society who bind her in chains and reject her as a being in comparison to man. Earlier, woman sought her identity in the relationship as a wife, mother and daughter. She accepted this identity willingly. But now-a-days woman rejects this relational identity. Now she is able to understand the artificiality of this identity that is imposed on her by society so that she may restrain herself as a being. But now, woman wants to stand on her feet as a full human being, equal to man in society.

Manju Kapur is one of the famous Indian writers among the novelists of present century. She is the most appreciated Indian English woman novelist and like Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, and Shobha De. She has basically written about women, about their identity, their problems, and their marriage and about their life style. Manju Kapur emerges as a significant novelist who gave new depth, direction, richness and significance to English novels. Her novels deal with social issues and she depicts these issues through the characters of her novel. Kapur depicts self-realization and inner psyche of women’s mind in her novels.

Manju Kapur as an emerging Indian woman writer of English in present century born in Amritsar and an M.Phil. From Delhi University. She is an eminent writer in Indo-Anglican

fiction and her writings have a strong impact upon the society. She wrote poetry and drama at first attempt then she wrote novels. *Difficult Daughters*, the first novel of Manju Kapur received great praise and international fame. This novel was awarded the commonwealth prize for the best creation and a first book. Today, women play an important and bigger role in the society. They are tried to take more responsibility in every possible means than their male counterparts. The every positive step of woman will lead to a direction that will see the dawn of real freedom. According to Rabindranath Tagore – “Woman is a builder and moulders of nations’ destiny. Though delicate and soft as lily, she has a heart far strong and bolder than that of a man. She is the supreme inspiration of any man’s onward march”. No doubt, women, have received constitutional rights of equality but the change in social attitudes towards women is yet to be achieved.

This paper offers an analysis of the notion “women’s quest for Identity”. This analysis suggests that the character, quality and conception of the person play an important role in the formation of personal identity. The quest for identity exhibits a basic need of human, the need to structure one’s personal identity in comparison to others, to find roots and establish connections to the past as well as to the future. This is a search motivated by uncertainty. The quest for identity is marked by self-reflection, by the readiness of individuals to make radical changes in the way they perceive themselves as well as in their relations with others. We know that identity is not a matter of fate but is also a product of reflection, discovery and choice.

Woman has mental ability and moral power, yet she is not treated as equal with man. Now here the question of searching of identity is justified. A woman is wife, mother, servant and sister in the society of male but her individual self has very little recognition in the society. Manju Kapur, a world famous writer and she is known for her feministic vision. In her novels she shows the women with the existence of mothers and daughters. Her protagonists are mostly educated and they are the representatives of the female folk. The women of Kapur’s novels are the symbol of female imagination and her novels are a story of struggle for liberty and search for an identity. The novelist tries to find out significant new meanings and the protagonists of her novels are endeavour to maintain a balance between family and society. The woman who lives and struggle under the oppressive mechanism of a society is described in the writings of Manju Kapur. Her novels reflect the lives of women who are in eternal quest for meaningful life.

In the first novel *Difficult Daughters*, the novelist has portrayed Virmati as a woman caught in the conflict between the passion of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day. The protagonist of the novel, rebels against tradition. The title of the novel indicates a message that a woman, who make efforts in search of an identity. This novel reveals the women who try to establish their own identity.

The story of the novel centers on the character of Virmati, protagonist of the novel. It represents the women of three generation, Kasturi, her daughter Virmati and Virmati’s daughter Ida. The major portion of the story of the novel revolves around the character of Virmati, the difficult daughter of the second generation. The protagonist, Virmati was the eldest among the eleven children of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash. As the eldest child, she is encumbered with the duties and responsibilities because of her mother’s incessant pregnancies. She lost her childhood because her mother Kasturi never gave her the emotional security and on the other side Virmati engaged in mothering her younger siblings.

Virmati was always busy in arranging the house-hold affairs during the pregnancies of her mother. She was dutiful and of caring nature. The novelist writes about her caring nature and duties – “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. She was impatient and intolerant of fuss. If they didn't eat their meals, on her return home from school she would hunt out the offending brother or sister and shove the cold food down their throats. If they refused to wear the hand-me-down clothes she assigned them, she slapped them briskly. Usually once was enough. Sometimes she tried to be gentle, but it was weary work and she was almost always tired and harassed."¹ It shows that Virmati was forced to keep the responsibility of the family in the early age. Thus Virmati is portrayed as a common Indian woman by the novelist in the novel.

She has spent her valuable time in the household duties. She wants to spend her life freely without take any responsibility but she is looking so engaged in household duties. Living in Amritsar Virmati suddenly gets an opportunity of freedom. Virmati seems to be the champion of feminism in the novel. About her dresses, her outlook, her style, the novelist utters – "Her dress too had changed from her Amritsar days. When they went visiting she wore her saris in Parsi-style, as Shakuntala called it, with the palla draped over her right shoulder. The saris were of some thin material, foreign, with a woven silk border sewn onto them. The blouses were of the same thin material, with loose sleeves to the elbows. She wore her hair with a side parting, smoothed over her ears into a bun at the back. Her shoes were black, shiny, patent leather with high heels."² Manju Kapur seriously described the life style of traditional Indian family. Virmati's cousin Shakuntala studied in Lahore, modern in behaviour and on the other side Virmati succumbs in household duties.

Virmati is attracted towards the life style of Shakuntala because her life is free and she is free from the family responsibilities. The novelist represents two different women in the novel. Shakuntala is educated and she is not bound in any family responsibility and on the other hand, Virmati is typical Indian woman. She is bound in family duties. Her dreams and desires vanished in day-to-day struggle. Manju Kapur carefully uses the struggle for independence. She also reveals the freedom struggle of Virmati. Virmati desires that she would live her life without any burden and responsibility like Shakuntala. Virmati wished to study further but her family rejects her wish. Even she is not supported by her mother because her mother Kasturi also desires about the early marriage of Virmati. Through the protagonist and other women characters, the novelist exposes the reality of Indian society. Virmati is unable to decide to choose her love or further study. When she disappointed with her love, she makes an attempt of suicide. Finally she decides to go to Lahore to continue her study.

She is the woman who thinks independently, she has her own views and opinions and she wants to do something special more than just marrying. Under this new friendship with Swarna Lata, Virmati attempts to analyze the communal tension involved during the Indian freedom struggle. The novelist beautifully linked the Virmati's character in the activities of freedom movement. According to the novelist Virmati attended many conferences organized by many parties and also she heard many speeches delivered by the politicians time to time. When Virmati goes for a meeting organized by women for the freedom struggle, Manju Kapur writes – "Virmat's hands clapped too, as loud and as long as the others. Then Miss Saubhagya Sehgal, chairman of the reception committee, gave the welcome address. I didn't know we were still at the welcome stage, thought Virmati."³

In her second novel, *A Married Woman*, Manju Kapur describes about the different phases in the life of a woman, pre and post marriage. In the novel the theme of female bonding appears in a different form. The whole story of the novel revolves around the protagonist of the novel Astha. Astha is an educated woman of a middle class family. She is the only female child

of her father and the mother- "She was her parents' only child. Her education, her character, her health, her marriage, these were their burdens. She was their future, their hope, and though she didn't want them to guard their precious treasure so carefully, they did, oh they did."⁴ Her parents both of whom are in the job. Astha is a talented painter. Her father is a senior bureaucrat and her mother is a teacher by profession.

Manju Kapur's work is a woman activist's talk not on the grounds that she is a lady presenting on women's issues. But she tries to comprehend a lady both as a lady and an individual pressurized by obvious and unnoticeable contexts. She discovers the middle class woman's cultural identity and the struggle for the self. In the novels of Manju Kapur, the role of woman has undergone a significant change. Her writing is merely an investigation of female character and cultural identity. She describes a female character in a real way. In depicting, the inner subtlety of a woman's mind, Kapur reveals a mature understanding of the female Psyche. The woman in the novels of Manju Kapur is presented as a new female who struggles against the social evil system. The protagonists of her novels try to break the tradition of silence. Her concern with and search for the causes of human suffering lends intensity and depth to her writings.

Women live and struggle under the oppressive social system and mechanism of a closed society are reflected in the writings of Manju Kapur. She delves deep into the psyche of her women characters where she finds them struggling to strike a balance between self and society. She depicts the exploration of the disturbed psyche of the Indian woman laying emphasis on the factors of loneliness. Her novels portray the inner lives of hyper sensitive women who are in eternal quest for meaningful life. Her characters suffer intensely because of their futile attempt to find emotional contact, response and understanding. She is anxious with the psychological mind of Indian woman who undergo inexpressible sufferings in their marital life. They bring up the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own.

Kapur highlights the factors which restraint the liberty of the female to live, grow and actualize herself the way men do. In this sense, her novels are a significant contribution towards the realm of Indian English fiction and feminist psycho analysis in India. In her novel *A Married Woman*, Manju Kapur has taken writing as a protest from the point of a woman's experience. This novel is a sincere acceptance of a woman about her personality cult in the verge of a bad marriage. The novel raises the disputed issue of homosexual relationship in a challenging way. This is getting more and more visible in the modern society, though we may or may not accept it.

The novel "A Married woman" revolves around the character of Astha. It talks about the different stages and steps of a woman, pre and post marriage. By keeping the traditional values, Astha's parents are hopeless for her marriage. Astha's mother has the opinion- "There is time for everything. The girl is blossoming now. When the fruit is ripe, it has to be picked. Later she might get into wrong company and we will be left, ringing our hands. If she marries at this age, she will have no problem for adjusting. We too are not so young that we can afford to wait."⁵ Hemant is an MBA from America and serves as an Assistant manager in a bank in Delhi. Hemant seems to match her dream of an ideal husband in the beginning of their married life and this marriage seems to fulfill her childlike dreams. Astha belongs to a typical middle class family but she breaks the chain of her traditional family. Before marriage she fell in love with a man. These all romantic feelings of love flutter in her bosom right from teen age. But this episode soon comes to an end when Astha's mother complains against it to Bunty's parents.

During her final year of graduation, her aching heart finds relaxation in the luxurious atmosphere of Rohan. Rohan goes to Oxford for higher education. In her early days of marriage,

she enjoys life. Then their marriage falls into the expected pattern. When Astha was expecting her first child, her mother-in-law wishes her to have a boy. Kapur depicts such tugs of war within a world of gender politics, where male figures and female agents of patriarchy set the limits within which women must struggle for their version of individuality. Their first child is a girl. Hemant's desire to have a son makes Astha dissatisfied and uneasy. When Astha is pregnant she enjoyed of her pregnancy- "Astha enjoyed every aspect of her pregnancy. As it advanced, she became more and more bucolic. Teaching was an effort, and she had no energy for any extra activity. At home she slept most of the time. Hemant adored what was happening a woman before my very eyes, 'he said passing his hands over her belly, large and full, over her breasts, certainly larger and fuller than they had ever been.'"

Her aching heart gets some relief in the caring words of Aijaz. It allots a sense to her emotional need. As a married woman, Astha becomes an enduring wife and sacrificing mother. Her temperamental conflict with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of mother and father for her children. This denies her self-fulfilment and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Restlessness drives her to enjoy absolute loneliness, a sort of entrapment by the family, its commitments, its subtle oppression and she yearns for freedom. She is suffocated with the growing needs of her family and always adjusting to everybody's needs.

Pipeelika offers her much comfort because they are facing the same trauma. Her suffering compels her to fall in an inescapable situation. *A Married Woman* analyzes Astha's longing for a purpose to her life other than being a wife and mother. She dwells on various feministic issues in this novel like female education and their empowerment, financial independence and so on. She narrates important issues of class and nationhood and connects them to the emerging sense of female identity in post colonial India. Manju Kapur advocates the plausible reality that education brings dignity, honour and power. It is important to note that education plays dominant role in the lives of women. If in certain cases it fails to free them from the shackles of male dominance, social tradition and popular prejudices. It also gives them the authority to doubt and question to assert and reshape their lives. Her novel *A Married Woman* enables us to get an idea of the feminist struggle against the search for distinct identity.

From the very beginning Astha's life has been controlled by her mother. Her mother always imposed her decisions on her daughter. She focuses all her energy on moulding Astha into an ideal wife, daughter-in-law and a perfect mother like a typical mother. Astha's parents want her to study to the utmost level of the requirement of marriage. Astha wished to lead a free and independent life but her initial gesture- a love affair with Rohan- fails, with Rohan deserting her as he leaves for Oxford for higher studies. Her parents want to educate her at higher level so she was obliged to take admission in M.A. During his post-graduation she meets to Hemant, a young charmer who just returned from USA. Astha attracted towards him. They loved to each other. Astha's parents also give their consent for marriage. Soon an engagement of both decided- "A few weeks later the engagement between Astha and Hemant Vadera was decided upon. The wedding was to be held in June. By then Astha's MA exams would be over, Hemant's elder sister's children would have their holidays, and his younger sister would be able to come for a month from the States. With all this settled, Astha and Hemant began to date."⁷ After the completion of her education she gets a job as a school teacher.

Astha finally gets married to Hemant- "Night came, the barat arrived. Astha was called to garland her groom to the taped music of shehnais. At the auspicious hour they sat down next to each other under a small rickety pandal, with a fan trained on them. The hot air from the fan, the smoke from the fire, the sight of her father waiting to do kanyadaan, the feel of her hand in

the hand of her bridegroom, in a trance she realised this was the beginning of the life ordained for her.”⁸ Beside being a teacher and a married woman with two children, Astha maintains herself and she was devoted to her family - “Being a teacher meant the languor of her days was over. No longer did she have the luxury of leisurely brooding over her love, she had to get up early and go to work. She has exercises to correct, and lessons to prepare. She started a reading club, a writing club, a painting club, directed by the principal’s suggestions and followed through with her encouragement. The peripheries of her world now stretched to include many schoolgirls. Life was shaping up nicely, with her mind and heart gainfully employed.”⁹ She executes her each responsibility very well. She maintained herself and fully devoted to Hemant, her husband.

The husband of Astha, was always preoccupied with his business activities. So Astha needed a companion to soothe and comfort her emotionally as well as physically. She meets to Aijaz, who is a wizard or a magician and also a lecturer of history. He has an immense knowledge in the field of drama- “Bring them, they will benefit. Aijaz is a wizard. He is actually a history lecturer, but his knowledge of drama is immense. Besides writing his own plays and songs, he has adapted Brecht, Shakespeare, and Greek tragedy into Hindi. People grumble about the lack of activity in the school, but when it comes to giving our students exposure they come up with all kinds of objections. Where is the school spirit?”¹⁰ Astha was highly impressed by the learning and talent of Aijaz and soon her impression is changed into infatuation. After some time she is in love with him and they become lovers.

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