SEARCH FOR IDENTITY: WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

ABSTRACT

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CHAPTER-I: Introduction

This research propose to deal with the burning issue of the identity of women in the context of renowned Indian woman novelist Manju Kapur’s five novels- *The Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), and *Custody* (2011). The identity of woman is a burning issue and an entirely new challenge for the women's movement in India. In India that is especially patriarchal, women’s assertion of their rights and identity has shaken the very foundation of patriarchal society and given a challenge to male hegemony. This awakening for their rights and identity has brought a change in the world of woman. The change that is closely related to the changed social, political, economic and educational condition in society. A detailed study of Kapur’s novels highlights the struggles made by her women characters of the novels in the search for their identities and renders Kapur outstanding in the field of contemporary Indian English Fiction dealing with the women’s issues.

This research proposes to show how Manju Kapur has tried to portray the different phases of women as they change with the changing times. She has aimed at displaying how the women were and how they have changed since independence to the contemporary times. The discussion starts with feminist theory that takes up the question of identity and then it focuses on Manju Kapur's six novels: *The Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011) in next six chapters with the analysis of identity that the different women characters of the novels succeed in achieving.
Indian movement for identity and assertion has its roots in western feminism. Mary Wollstonecraft and her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, can be said to be the first voice in favour of women’s liberation movement. 1920 was the year when American women got voting rights. The consciousness grew in 1960 when women realized the lopsided attitude of society. The domestic responsibilities that she had been sincerely shouldering were not being accredited as her attribute or talent. The ideal picture of woman is like Sita who is the shadow of her husband, her life, her needs, and her existence is dependent on her husband. Her life is not hers but is meant for her husband only. She shall eat only what her husband eats. She has never thought as to what dishes she likes or dislikes. This is the image of an ideal woman and any woman who crosses the borders of this idealism is supposed to be revolting. The male counterparts occupy her whole space and she is left bereft of any time or thinking for herself.

It is here and at this point that the question of quest for identity arises and that of assertion as well. It is not with a point of view to break ties and relationships with males/ husbands but it is with the sole motive of discovering herself. The inner potential, the great force that lies hidden in her need to be uncovered. Females, through their liberation movement and feminist view are trying to search and achieve this independent identity for her. Feminism emphasizes on the freedom of woman to choose her life style, her profession and her pattern of behaviour. For all this she need not depend on man. She may be physically a weaker sex, but she is very powerful from inside. Feminism is trying to organize women in such a manner that women from different walks of the society may come close and by developing companionship empower themselves. They also provide means to fight hypocritical concepts imposed on women by society.
Today, feminism is viewed more as a fast developing critical ideology or system of ideas in its own right. The concept of feminism consists of a wide spectrum of ideas. Its developmental stages have been dependent upon the tension with male oriented political and intellectual hegemony. It encompasses the ideology and movement for socio-political changes based on critical analysis of patriarchy. It is not only against women’s subordination to men but also the dictatorship of the latter in defining the role of women in the society.

Feminism in Indian context is a by-product of the western liberalism in general and feminist thought in particular. The indigenous contributing factors have been the legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the freedom struggle, constitutional rights of women, spread of education and the consequent new awareness among women. In literary terms it precipitates in a search for identity and a quest for the definition of self. In critical practice, it boils down to scrutinizing empathetically the plight of women characters at the receiving end of human interaction.

Gandhiji gave a new direction and dimension to the feminist movement in India and strove to free women from passivity and servility. He linked women’s betterment with the society’s betterment and declared that no society can hope to progress by keeping its women backward. By and large, in the ancient history of India, women have been glorified and that is also regarded as myths. However, in reality, most of the times, a contradictory state of affairs existed. There are archetypal images and there are also debased images. The conceptual tradition regarding the status and role of woman in Indian needs to be clarified as this serves as a background or a foundation on which the later edifices have been built. It is an accepted fact that in the Vedic Age, a high
The concept of womanhood prevailed. The society recognized virtues, merit and talent wherever they existed and gender distinctions were not taken into account. Woman could besides fulfilling their distinctive roles, also participate in several other walks of life. However in later years, there was sharp decline in the condition of woman.

In post-Independence India, the spread of education inculcated a sense of individual freedom among women and aroused an interest in their rights. It gave a start to “the Women’s Liberation Movement”. It is not a movement against men, but it aims to have equal pay for equal work, equal say in controlling and planning the family and above all have the freedom to choose their lifestyle and their profession. It somehow resulted that women have started becoming economically independent and there is a striving for the realization of their own aspirations. Feminist trends appeared on the horizon and they came into conflict with the conventional moral code. In fact a set of new paradigms and conflicts related to a woman’s life came into existence; modernity, self assertion and self-effacement, economic dependence and independence and so on.

This radical change inspired women to redefine her new role and determine its parameters for her and the society in every walk of life and perhaps revolutionize the concept of womanhood itself. The new woman’s striving for an identity of her own is also not just an imitation of the west. This point is made very clear when we look at the question of identity and equality in the context of India, it is still a question of stark survival. Women in India are still caught between feudal values and lifestyle and the fast approaching new mores. Caught between the burden of the home and the workplace, child bearing, mothering, struggling with conventions, women have first to survive; the question of equality is a far cry. In such turbulent times characterized by flux, it is essential to identify the new areas of trouble and to check the imbalance. We
should give thanks to a number of Indian Women novelists in the last part of twentieth century like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande and the novelist of twenty-first century like Manju Kapur and other upcoming novelists who have a feminist sensibility and present the women characters as the central character who raise their voice against existing social set up that is to exploit and suppresses them.

The eight lettered word “Identity” has been included in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as noun and has been explained in three ways: (a) who or what somebody or something is, (b) the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others, (c) the state or feeling of being very similar to and able to understand somebody\something.

Analyzing the above explanatory meanings of “identity” it seems difficult to grasp the idea of identity. The very first meaning that arises is who or what somebody is. The second one is what are the dimensions by which one distinguishes oneself from others, and the third meaning raises the question how one finds similarity with others?

A number of questions make the word “identity” more complex and difficult to understand, it is better to turn towards biological psychology where the concept of “identity” has been explained in detail. Women are women because they are different from men in Saussaur’s process of giving meaning and identity to the units of a language because these differences are social construction. No doubt women have different sex to men. This difference is biological and helps women to give their identity because their biological structure is different from man. Following the structuralist approach in order to give an identity to women, the third wave feminism
favours maintaining this biological difference without carping at the Maker. But the society made construction of “gender” which leads to denigration of the social, political and economic status of women by presenting them as the opposite of men who are presented as strong, courageous, sharp minded scrupulous while women are weak, emotional, weak-willed, unscrupulous. So feminists are not in favour of such identity.

The concept of “identity” is a long discussed subject in psychology. The psychologists claim that the question of identity prevails throughout the life time journey of an individual and it is an integral part of one’s life. There are two important sources that determine one’s identity and they are the social role that is given to an individual for being a part of society and the other is the individual’s history that is related to his or her life. The two sources intermingle and give different identities to an individual. if these have mutual correspondence to any another identity it gives positive identity to an individual, but if there is a clash, it gives negative identity and results in identity crisis. It is often said that identity keeps on changing with the context.

A close analysis of her five novels reveals Kapur’s preoccupation with identity. These identities are; identity of women as feminist women, domestic or patriarchal women, rebels and victims. Identity as a feminist woman talks about that woman who demands for equality with men. The domestic or patriarchal woman is one who finds her recognition as being a part of patriarchy. Victims are those who perpetuate patriarchy by being its agent because they find it unable to make any change in this patriarchal system. Rebels oppose the patriarchy by considering it oppressive. The following chapters trace and analyse the various kind of identity revealed in the five novels of Kapur.
CHAPTER-II : Portrayal of Women Characters in *Difficult Daughters*

_Difficult Daughters_ is a family saga by Manju Kapur where she depicts a joint family of grandfather, uncles and aunts with a number of siblings living together. As this research attempts to deal with this concept of identity from women’s point of view, this chapter classifies identity chiefly into three types: identity as a “feminist woman”, “traditional woman” and as “rebel”. This multilayered identity that has been classified into different types focuses how different types of identities are connected with different female characters who appear in the novel viz Virmati, Ida, Kasturi, Lajwanti, Ganga, Shakuntala and Swarnlata. The close analysis of their lives helps to draw out specific identities they succeed in acquiring in their lives.

The focus of the novel is on the female protagonist Virmati as the novel starts with her cremation and proceeds with flashbacks where the story of her life is told by her daughter Ida. The novel turns out to be the story of a young girl Virmati whose life appears to be a journey in search for an identity. It shows first her attempt to make for herself an identity as an “educated girl” for which she struggles hard. Her emotional attachment and physical love for professor proves miserable for her and shatters her hope. But her departure to Nahan somehow helps to give a ray of happiness and peace out of the dark clouds of unhappiness and miseries. This time she earns her a new identity as a principal. But her journey for the search for identity ends with her recognition as the second wife of the professor that only breeds miseries and sorrows in her life. She asserts her wish for higher education, her right to choose her life-partner. She revolts against the conventions and norms that are made particularly for women to perpetuate the dominance of man and subordination of woman. But, the identity that is
given to her by the society is rebellious. What should be noteworthy here is she starts her journey to assert her identity as an independent person but fails to complete this journey and accepts her dependence on the professor as his second wife.

Manju Kapur portrays the three generations of women at different points of nation’s history and shows how with the changes of time their aspirations change. Kasturi and Lajwanti, the women of the first generation live according to patriarchal society without any demand of change and are traditional. Ganga, though a woman of the second generation, comes out as the same because of her illiteracy. In Ganga, Kapur gives the picture of a traditional woman who is unhappy with her life, yet ready to endure all the atrocities without exposing herself by coming out to the four boundaries of home.

Virmati, Shakuntala and Swarnlata, the women of the second generation demand for the change in the patriarchal system and come out as modern. Shakuntala demands a change in the social set-up so that a woman can also have her identity instead of being a subordinate to man. This change in social set-up will uplift the status of woman and reduce the crimes related to woman. Shakuntala is independent. She possesses inner strength and prefers to stay alone in a hostel though she is the daughter of a conservative Arya Samaji where a woman's glory is in her home. She is educated and an enlightened person who yearns for her identity and individuality and somehow succeeds in it if compared to Virmati. Swarnlata asserts her individuality and integrates it with her commitment to the society as a home maker. She succeeds in her search for identity. She makes a marriage on her own terms. She sets down certain conditions which are accepted by her spouse and thus fulfills her duty.

Ida, the narrator of story, tries to weave the past of her mother with her own present. She belongs to the third generation. The first information the readers come across is
that she is the divorced daughter of Virmati. It is better not to interpret her condition as pathetic but to accept her as a new woman who has the guts to manage her life without having a male companion who is supposed to be her bread-winner for woman, though being single she becomes an object of pity for the relatives. She, actually, comes across as more modern equipped to compete with the society in her attempt to make a change in the patriarchal set up and to make it more supportive for women and place them equal with men.

CHAPTER-III: Clash between Tradition and Modernity in
Formation of Identity: Women Characters in *A Married Woman*

The novel *A Married Woman* revolves around Astha, the protagonist of the novel and other female characters. A keen study of the each of the female characters allows a reader to classify them in different headings as “feminist woman”, “the domestic or patriarchal women” and “rebellious women”. “Feminist woman” is a woman who raises her voice against the suppression of women and demands for the equality with men, but with gradual change in society’s perception of women. “The domestic or patriarchal women” are who are found willing to live in the conditions made for them within patriarchal society. “Rebellious women” are who are desperate for the subversion and rebel against society, and the victims who do not want to live in the patriarchal society and hate the customs and norms made especially for women, but are helpless to raise their voice.

Asthna comes across as a woman who wants to change this traditional society and yearns for a society there would be no difference between man and woman, but she never takes any firm step for it. She was living in a world where she was suppressing her desires and yearning. In Astha, we find a desire and yearning to live a life on her
own terms, not according to the terms dictated by patriarchy. Like Virmati, she protests against everything that she finds only to underestimate the strength of a woman and to make her dependent on others. In Astha, we find a character who imagines a life according to modern thoughts where there would be no difference between the work of a man and a woman. She however follows the duties that a woman is given to follow. Astha comes across as a woman who wants to change this traditional society and yearns for a society there would be no difference between man and woman.

The next women character of second generation is Pipeelika who is seen struggling to cope up with traditionalism and come out as a modern women. She succeeds in acquiring this identity. She believed in equality of woman with man. She herself is free to live her life and ready to break the shackles of traditionalism. She tackles her inter-faith marriage very easily because she has made up her mind to it and had confidence in herself. She comes out as an independent woman in Astha’s mind. She is living in the same time Astha, but one thing that Pipeelika has and Astha has not is her strong will power and confidence to cope up with the obstacles that come in her path without being trapped between traditionality and modernity like Astha. Reshana is another woman character in the novel. She is like Pipeelika an independent woman, free to live her life.

Kapur paints the picture of her women characters in different colours. The women of the first generation as, Astha’s mother and her mother-in-law are seen traditional. Astha’s mother Sita is a traditional hard working woman. She believes that a woman should be shy and tradition driven as she is and that the main goal of a girl in life is to get married and the parents have this duty to perform to live life peacefully. Astha’s mother-in-law is a traditional woman who thinks it is only a son and heir who takes the family line further. Pipeelika’s mother also comes out as a traditional woman who is
not in favour of her daughter getting married to a Muslim. The life she had lived was full of suffering as she lost her husband at a very young age and managed to live with her children with a teaching job at Shiksha Kendra. She does not want to be burden on her parents, this is why she decides to live independently and taking the responsibility of her children herself. So, she comes out as a woman who has the guts to live independently, yet following the norm of society where woman are given no choice, she turns to be a traditional woman.

**CHAPTER-IV : Conflict between Desire and Demand in Search for an Identity: Women Characters in *Home***

*Home* (2006), the third novel by Kapur, explores an ordinary middle-class family’s life in Delhi. The head of this family, Banwari Lal is a follower of patriarchy and believes that men should work out of the home and women should within, that men carry forward the family line and women enable their mission. Kapur skillfully brings out how gender issues are deeply rooted and stem out from social norms and traditions in which women are made captives and thereby to an extent preventing the man too from being his real self.

Nisha who is the most promising character in comparison to other characters is in the novel seen more assertive, who makes an effort to make a proper place for herself by demanding a change for female world in the patriarchal society. In Nisha we can see the glimps of Virmati for her Interest in studies. Both aspire for higher studies. But at the same time both get their graphs down as they become college going. Virmati’s graph get down because of her involvement with Harish and Nisha because she is made involved in household chores as well as little interest of her family in her studies. As Nisha enteres a college she finds herself inclined towards other things apart
from studies. She is attracted towards a boy who she met often in the bus for her college. The name of the boy was Suresh who is attracted towards Nisha. A normal conversation starts between them and she is encouraged by Pratibha to express her liking for Suresh. Nisha feels herself independent and free in her college hours. She wants to live her life independently. She has a feeling of independence like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*. She does not want to live like her mother who always tries to be a traditional women living according to patriarchal society that has decided women’s place is home.

Sona, wife of Yashpal, comes out as patriarchal woman because she tries to gain her identity in patriarchal set up by trying to fit in it. She and Yashpal have a love marriage that results in much negligence and ill-treatment for Sona. When Yashpal expresses his wish to get married with Sona, it is supposed to be the result of black magic cast on Yashpal by Sona. She is found to be a narrow minded woman who was fed herself with the thoughts that only serve to make the life of a female worse and degrading. She does not appear in anyway a supporter of empowerment of woman. Kapur, with the character of Sona delineates the reality of society where there are a number of Sonas who should be held responsible for the unchanged narrow lifestyle of female because they favour for the narrow upbringing of female who can be seen always dependent on male for her life.

Sona is seen fully soaked with the traditional mindset that a woman should have a child. She finds herself unable to conceive. When her sister suggests that she should consult a doctor, she thinks it would be humiliating to be seen as a “flawed creature” to get medical aid to perform a “natural function”. She cannot initiate this by
herself unless it is suggested by her in-laws. Delineating a true picture of Indian society, Kapur shows how Sona as well as her in-laws believe in miracles done by God instead of deficiency and its cure by a doctor. Sona keeps fast and her father-in-law plans to visit a shrine at Chitai, near Almora. Though the novel is set in India of 1960s when it was the prevailing thought, but even today many believe in miracles by God more than medical treatment as Kapur has shown in her latest novel *Custody* (2011).

One thing that is noticeable is how a woman is seen as always dependent on others. As a child she needs to be dependent but after passing this stage and coming to her youth why does she not become independent? The answer may be that she gets her upbringing within such constricted walls that do not make her suitable to be independent in future. Is this not the cunningness of patriarchal society that deprives a plant of proper care and nurture and as result it needs the support even after growing to a tree? What feminists want is to give proper care to a girl by giving her proper education and help to become a person. It is only proper education that can provide them help in their independence. And it would result in happy future of a woman when instead of being exploited by the male dominated society, she could succeed in proving her ability and would become equally important in the society that is made of two sexes, of man and woman.

Asha and Rekha, these two characters are seen grinding in the patriarchal set up. They remain voiceless and sufferers. Pooja who belongs to the same generation tries to give voice to her needs and then becomes unfavorable for a traditional mother-in-law like Sona. Sona finds its unbearable how Pooja instead of sitting together with the members of family as all daughter in-laws used to do, is always found with Raju in her bed room.
Thus, the whole novel is woven around the life of a middle class family with the focus on women in which some try to make their lives adjustable while others are seen engaging with something different from traditional roles and gain their own identity. Among the various women characters, Nisha’s character, the daughter of Sona, is seen as more promising. She struggles to search an identity as a successful business woman and somehow succeeds.

CHAPTER-V: Self versus Society: A Search for Identity in *Immigrant*

*The Immigrant* is the fourth novel by Manju Kapur that was published in 2008. The novel deals with the efforts made by the protagonist to secure her selfhood in her struggle against societal norms that prove obstacles for her. Nina, the protagonist of the novel comes out as one of the feminist women who struggle to be the part of society but at the same time, go against those norms that become as obstacles in securing her particular identity. In order to secure a particular place and to have her unique identity, she does not hesitate to leave her husband and thus goes against the societal norm where a woman is always taught to be the worshipper of her husband and expected to devote all her life to her husband.

Being brought up in traditional Indian society and nurtured by her traditional mother, she was always taught the norms and customs of patriarchal society, but there was a suppressed desire in her to go against those norms of patriarchy that hinder the path of a woman to walk freely and independently. In the company of feminist women in Canada, her suppressed desires start coming out slowly. Finding Anand too narrow-
minded, though he presents himself as open-minded criticizing the Indian customs that differentiate a girl and a boy, she never felt that she could be independent in his company. There was a lack of understanding between them. Ananda never desired to share everything with her to make her feel as his true companion. This is why at last, she left him forever with a confidence in her heart to give a new beginning to her life that could make her independent and with her individuality she would have her identity.

Nina’s mother was a traditional woman and an introvert. It was the miserable fact of her life that she could not get her daughter married who had turned thirty. When a proposal came for Nina of a boy thirty-one-year old, she made Nina agree to give attention to it. Nina, in order to lessen the tension of her mother as well as for the sake of having a partner made herself ready to think about the proposal and ready to see the visitor; the sister of the boy. Nina’s mother Mrs. Batra had approved Anand as fit for Nina. She did not agree with Nina who she took more time to think about it.

The other woman character is Alka, sister of Anand. She is also a traditional woman like her mother. She makes an arrangement to get her brother, who was living abroad in Canada, married to an Indian girl. She was a traditional woman. She thinks that in a marriage the girl must always make adjustment.

Sue is the other female character in the novel. She is a Canadian woman. But she should be studied along with the Indian female characters to bring out similarities as well as difference between Indian women and the women of the foreign countries, like Canada. She is seen more exposed and independent in thinking. At first, she is seen attracted towards Ananda physically. But her desire for sex made Ananda detach himself. She finally married Gary which made Ananda much troubled as how to maintain his relationship with his true friend, Gary. But, with the passage of time, all
got settled. It made Ananda to feel how his country is different in the matter of sexuality.

Gayatri Gulati, the one of the members of the group that was formed for women’s empowerment, comes out as feminist. Gayatri and Nina were the counselors to each other. When she came to Nina’s house, she spoke about her own condition, that she was caught between her own desires and the expectations of her parents. She was also an Indian, like Nina living with her parents in Canada. She was forced to marry an Indian, though she loved Kipling who was not her parent’s choice. She discussed all this with Nina.

Mrs. Singh, the landlady of the house where Nina and her mother lived, was also a traditional lady. Though she does not play a big role in the novel, little details tell about her that she is a traditional lady. She was seen worried about the marriage of Nina that Nina didn’t like. But after the death of her mother, she is the one who informed Alka, Nina’s sister-in-law, about her mother’s death. She realized the importance that her mother used to give her. She gave her everything that her mother had after her death.

Thus the different women characters in the novel are seen struggling to have their identity. They are placed in the different categories of feminist woman, patriarchal or domestic woman, victim and rebel with the analysis of their struggles the made for their identity. Nina, the woman of the second generation comes out as one of the feminist women who struggle to be the part of society but at the same time, goes against those norms that become as obstacles in securing her particular identity. Her mother and Mrs. Singh, the women of first generation are seen traditional. Alka, though the woman of second generation, but is more traditional. Gayatri Gulati, the one of the members of
the group that was formed for women’s empowerment, comes out as a feminist.

CHAPTER-VI: Imposition and Acquisition in Search for an Identity in Custody

As the title of the novel is Custody, so the whole novel revolves around the custody of children and the identity of woman as mother. Here the identity of woman as mother dominates over other identities like that of Feminist woman, Domestic or Patriarchal woman, Rebel and Victims. The novel can be read as documenting the pressures a marriage faces in the age of the corporates but the title indicates the actual focus of novel.

Shagun comes across as a woman torn between her desire and her responsibilities. Ashok promises an independent life. She is free to pursue to her dream of passion and career. From a middle class Delhi housewife, she is transported to a life of corporate glamour. But she is also a mother and it is here that the conflict begins. She wants it all-Ashok, children, career. Does Manju Kapur want to indicate that for an Indian middle class mother, a totally Western makeover is impossible? That a mother will always bond with her children, wherever wayward passion may have taken her. Divorce and remarriage, rarely discussed in India till the liberalised 90s, forms the basis of this novel.

Ishita comes out as an essentialist feminist who tries to bring a change in narrow mind set of patriarchy. She does her best to safeguard the value of marriage and family, but also raises her voice against injustice. She suffers a lot during her first marriage, but does not lose her confidence to make a new start. Unlike Shagun, she keeps the value of
family intact and succeeds to have individuality and identity as mother.

She feels a motherly feeling in her that makes her indispensable for Rahul and Roohi, and later on for Roohi. She craves to possess Roohi and wants to satisfy her thwarted motherhood. She agrees to be a stepmother to Roohi by getting married with Raman. The “stepmother” is a term loaded with negative connotation. A stepmother is evil almost by definition. Kapur has invested the role of “stepmother” with a new significance. The stepmother Ishita is as loving and possessive about Roohi as her biological mother, Shagun.

Is this love for a child and desire for the identity of a mother that forces Ishita to bind her self again in marriage? The answer may be yes because it is the part of her personhood that she wants to be a mother. It doesn’t matter her body is an obstacle for it. Her idea for adoption is also a call of her instinct that longs for the identity of a mother that is now ‘choice’ for her. The happiness she feels when Raman wins the custody of Roohi compensates for all the sorrows that she had suffered for not being capable of begetting a child.

Kapur has dealt with problems of imposed motherhood by conservative patriarchy. She delineates the sufferings that a woman faces when she is unable to play the role of mother. A woman never wishes to deny this role as it is a feeling that gives her pleasure. So, it is not right to torture a woman when she faces the problem of infertility.

There are other female characters too that should be mentioned here. They all belong to the first generation and come out as patriarchal or domestic women because they try to maintain the patriarchal system, and confine themselves to the domestic
world, and wish same from the women of second generation. First, we talk about Mrs. Rajora, mother of Ishita comes out as a traditional woman. She accepts at once the proposal of a family that believe the role of a daughter-in-law as home-maker nothing else. She was ready to sacrifice the wish of Ishita to be independent.

After the marriage of Ishita, when she did not show any sign of pregnancy it made her mother tense. When Ishita went to consult a gynecologist who enquired about her medical history as if she had any disease like TB, it made her to disclose this truth to Ishita. But she was not ready to disclose this truth to her in-laws and husband. She was a woman who believes more in luck and miracles than applying her reason. She was very sad when Ishita had to break up her marriage with Suryakant. But due to her traditional thinking, she only feels sorry for her situation instead of encouraging her daughter to give a new start to her life.

Mrs. Sabharwal, mother of Shagun, also comes out as a patriarchal woman. She knew very well Shagun’s indifference towards Raman because Shagun’s happiness in his absence made her guess her involvement with another man. When Raman started suspecting of Shagun, she tried to know the reason for Shagun’s indifference to Raman. But Shagun’s reaction for Raman was not that was expected from a traditional wife.

The other character who also comes out as patriarchal woman is Mrs. Kaushik, mother of Raman. She is happy with her home that was filled with her grand children. She does not like Shagun to neglect her domestic responsibilities as she believed the home was the place for a woman and she always should keep her attention centered around her responsibilities. She started hating her when she and Raman started living in a separate house with their children. When Shagun’s relation with Raman ended with the discovery of Shagun’s affair with Ashok, it made her more harsh in words. She had
love for her son, but she never tried to come to know what had made Shagun to take such decision. Now after his divorce, she got an offer from her neighbour Mrs. Rajora to get him married with Ishita. Her husband did not agree because he wanted Raman to take the decision by himself.

Thus the study of this novel make us aware of the different types of women characters where some are seen successful in their search of identity as individual whereas some are seen as failures. Shagun and Ishita come out as promising women characters who raise their voice against the narrow thinking of the society and struggle to search our their identity as individuals. But, there are also some women characters, specially who belong to the the first generation like Shagun’s and Ishita’s mother and mother-in-law, who are seen confining themselves to the narrow world made for them by patriarchal society and wish to maintain this patriarchal system.

CHAPTER-VII: Conclusion

The Concluding part of any thesis is the result of critical and deep analysis. It is necessary to come to a conclusion after a study to make it worthwhile and fruitful. After the study of all five novels of Manju Kapur, and a critical analysis of each female character of the five novels, in terms of “identity”, it aims to be helpful in the empowerment of women. The concept of “identity” is a long discussed subject in psychology. The psychologists claim that the question of identity prevails throughout the life time journey of an individual and it is an integral part of one’s life. There are two important sources that determine one’s identity and they are the social role that is given to an individual for being a part of society and the other is the individual’s history.
that is related to his or her life. The two sources intermingle and give different identities to an individual. If these have mutual correspondence to any another identity it gives positive identity to an individual, but if there is a clash, it gives negative identity and results in identity crisis. It is often said that identity keeps on changing with the context. As the thesis analyses different categories of women characters as feminist woman, domestic or patriarchal woman, rebel and victim, it helps to identify the type of female character that would be supportive to the empowerment of other women and the ones that aim to shackle them in the patriarchal system. This thesis, also raises several issues like how some male characters in the novel appear oppressive to women whereas other play an important role in their empowerment.

At last my contribution while analyzing the novels of Manju Kapur, we can broadly categorise them under three major outlooks:

The first being, that Manju Kapur has tried to portray the different facets of women as they change with the changing times. She has aimed at displaying how the women are and have changed since independence to the contemporary times. In pre independence period, women were not allowed to get involved in political activities. It was Gandhiji, who inspired them, to get involved in political affairs and as the time progressed, they started holding economic power, and made their presence felt in the male dominated territories. They started taking decisions related to their marriage, up to boldly deciding to accept an NRI for marriage. The examples can be given of Virmati and Swarnalata from The Difficult Daughters who participated in political activities. The demand and the hold of economic power can be traced in the character of Rupa from Home. Astha, from A Married Woman can be seen much involved in the outside world activities like political affairs. The protagonist of The
Immigrant can also be seen as an example of a revamped woman who, unlike traditional women, remains unmarried till thirty and engages herself in teaching.

The second perspective highlights, that like Jane Austen Manju Kapur has focused on a small section of society. Her novels revolve primarily around the middle class Punjabi community. Though what has been written is universal and relates to all the communities like Gujarati and Bengali.

The third view point is that she showcases the rights of women, without being a revolutionist or violent in approach. She asserts that the women should strengthen their social reputation, by maintaining their place in the structured society and not by demolishing it, as most of the feminists do. She is a feminist from my point of view because in the Indian context where the traditions related to women are deep rooted since the existence of India as a country, it is not possible to demolish it wholly, but one thing can be done and that is to establish a place within the structure that has been established. Kapur does not present only those women who are doing so, but they are among the women who are violent and radical or patriarchal. I have classified all the women characters from all the novels in different categories as revolutionist, patriarchal and feminist. The woman characters who are placed in feminist category are the women who are trying to maintain their place within the structure to maintain their identity. The examples are Shakuntala and Swarnalata from The Difficult Daughters. Shakuntala exposes herself in the outside world. She takes part in the Indian struggle for freedom and with the independence of India, she achieves independence for herself. Though India gets freedom along with its partition but she herself remained integrated without being affected by partition. Swarnalata asserts her individuality and integrates it with her commitment to the society as a home maker. The other examples are Rupa
from *Home*, Astha, from *A Married Woman* tries to make an alteration in the patriarchy by stepping outside of the home that in patriarchy is the only area for woman she can move. She makes an attempt to establish her identity by seeking a job as a teacher and by participating in the political field along with her responsibility for her family. The other example is Ishita from *Custody*. Ishita comes out as a feminist who tries to bring a change in narrow mind set of patriarchy. She does her best to manage the value of marriage and family, but also raises her voice against the atrocity. She suffers a lot during her first marriage, but does not lose her confidence to make a new start. Unlike Shagun, she keeps the value of family and succeeds to have individuality and identity as mother.