CHAPTER-I

Introduction

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 of society.

This thesis analyses the novels of Manju Kapur, a renowned literary figure in Indian English Fiction of the twenty-first century and traces the contribution made by feminist theorists to the reading of the novel, a detailed study of Manju Kapur’s novels to spotlight the struggles made by the protagonists of the novels in the search for their identities and a final assessment and nuances which render Kapur so outstanding in the field of contemporary Indian English Fiction.

Manju Kapur has an impact on the society, especially Indian society because she writes about Indians and their society. As far as her biography is concerned; she has not disclosed much about her life. It is known about her that she was born on 25 October, 1948. She is married to Gun Nidhi Dalmia, a businessman and has four children; Katyani, Amba, Maya and Agastya. She was a teacher in Miranda House, Delhi University, but has taken VRS (Voluntary Retirement). She is known mainly for her novels, though she has also tried her hand at poetry and drama too. Her literary output consists of five outstanding novels. Her first novel Difficult
Daughters was published in 1998 and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for first book in Eurasia section. Her second novel A Married Woman came in 2002 and was shortlisted for the Encore Award. The third one Home was brought in 2006 and was shortlisted for Hutch Cross Word Award. Her fourth novel The Immigrant came in 2009 and the last novel Custody appeared in 2011.

Writing in twenty-first century, Manju Kapur does not want to present an idealized picture of woman painted by patriarchal society, where she is seen sacrificing everything for others. She wants to present the picture of modern woman, “…who prefer to exercise-her choice and break away from her traumatic experiences. Women are now portrayed as more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the women of the past. Instead of downgrading the elements of suffering at the hands of her lover or husband or man, she has started asserting her substantive identity in action, not in words. Whether it is Devi of Gita Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night, or Sita of Shashi Despande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors, or Lucy of J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace, the women have established a coherent class structure-one of assertion of identity and defiance of male supremacy, and protest at being subordinated by man”.  

This research propose to analyze this changing world of women where they are trying to secure their place and recognition as being part of the family (the domestic world) or of their own world or of society reconstructed with a female perspective. The discussion starts with the 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) with the analysis of identity that the different women characters of the novels succeed in achieving.
Feminism is a vast theory so; it is not possible to cover all of its aspects within a limited space provided here. So, we shall deal with its aspects that are accepted in Indian society. 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 counter-parts occupy her whole space and she is left benefit 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 of severing 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 woman need to be uncovered. Males with their ulterior motives shall not do this. Only 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 at man. She may be physically a weaker sex, but she is too powerful from within. 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 and 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 against women’s subordination to men but also the dictatorship of the latter in defining the role of women in the society.

Feminism has deconstructed the traditional image of woman. Woman, oppressed under the patriarchal domination found an outlet in feminist writings. The silent suffering of women got a voice. The lights of education, economic independence, voting rights etc. were basic steps women climbed towards emancipation. No doubt tremendous efforts have been made to raise the inferior status of women in Indian society. The fact still remains that such efforts have brought out only marginal change in the position of women in general. Indian woman confronts tradition oriented society and learns to live under the twin pressure of tradition and modernity. A tradition bound woman may sacrifice her happiness for the sake of well being of family as a unit, but at the same time retains her individuality.

Women suffer due to her emotional attachment with home. But since her sense of individuality has matured by introduction of education, she does not want to lead a passive married life of a sacrificial and shadow creature. She expects a measure of satisfaction. Woman has established herself as an autonomous being free from the restriction imposed by society, culture, nature and also free from her stereotyped
role of an illiterate- ignorant woman, a quarreling, gossiping mother or wife or a humble, submissive and obedient daughter. A ray of hope is seen as she emerges out of the four walls of her so called “home”. She no longer appears in her stereotyped roles but now she is projected as a thinker, an inventor and as a self conscious being in male dominated society.

Today, feminism seeks to rebel against the patriarchy. It offers a political challenge to male authority. Dr. Satendra Kumar writes in “The Creation of Manju Kapur As a Novelist”:

To be brief, the “Feminism” is name given to a political movement that gathered momentum in 1960s giving a call for liberation of women from certain forms of gender-based that deprived women of the opportunities for self promotion and equality with men simply because they were women. But the awareness that women are unjustly discriminated against and their inferior status has been deliberately constructed can be traced much earlier. This phenomenon of the 20th century is a crystallization of all forms of social-political and psychological awareness that patriarchal society with its various structure and organization is essentially hostile to women’s freedom and interested in keeping them subjugated in order to perpetuate the patriarchal power and authority.\(^2\)

In 1929, Virginia Woolf remarked that it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values, which have been made by the other sex. The feminist thinkers consider male psychology as a prim factor in female subjugation. The study, that constitutes the women’s world and its cultures and values are a major part of feminist studies.
Since time immemorial, there have been women fighting to free themselves from the male oppression. Economic, social, and political restrictions have been imposed on woman throughout history and in all civilization social pressures continue even today to limit women’s freedom, which ever country they belong to.

Feminism is generally thought of as a phenomenon of the 19th and 20th century. Most Anglo-American studies of the women’s movement acknowledge some forerunners in the English and French Revolutions and in individual figures such as Anne Hutchinson. But only with Seneca Falls does a continuously developing body of feminist thought seem to emerge. French feminism claims a longer past and identifies Christine de Pisan, as the first feminist thinker. She sparked of the four century long debate on women, which came to be called as “querelles des femmes”. The early feminists did not use the term Feminism. The long line of earlier women writers from Christine de Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft defines an outlook within which ideas develop; a theory in the original sense of term.

The querelle theory essentially referred to: (i) A dialectical stand in opposition to male defamation and subjection of women, (ii) It focused upon gender. According to it sexes are culturally and not just biologically formed. (iii) It aimed to oppose mistreatment of women. By exposing ideology and opposing the prejudice narrowness it stood for a general concept of humanity.

The ideas of early feminists bear the marks of the social and intellectual climate. Feminist traits are also discernible in the late medieval cities opposing misogyny and male subjection of women. This movement, however, did not gain social acceptance and the state and church together succeeded in crushing it. In the 1630s and 1650s many of the radical English sects supported religious equality for women. In this climate, there were women who effectively liberated themselves
from male clerical authority. They sought to control their own conscience, to preach and to improve women’s educational and economic opportunities. Anne Hutchinson was name among such feminists. This theory later gave rise to a women’s movement for democratic change. New ideas regarding social reorganization were afloat in the air. The early feminist theorists had carried on their long and patient intellectual resistance. They were the forebears of what Virginia Woolf called “the daughters of educated men”—daughters in revolt against fathers who schooled some of them for it was forbidden for women.

The feminism of 19th and early 20th century focused on the acquisition of a few basic political rights and freedom for women, such as the right of married women to own property and enter into contracts, the right of defendants to have women on juries, and right to vote. A campaign lasting a century ensued and culminated in the winning of the right to vote in England in 1918 and in America in 1920.

In order to make a proper study of Feminism, we can divide it into three waves. It is best to call the first wave of feminism as the Women's Movement that started in about 1830s in the Western countries especially in America. Women started struggling for suffrage. Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) and Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's own (1929) came out as magnum’ opus for these strugglers. A Vindication of the Rights of Women anticipated virtually all the demands of the woman’s movement—education, legal representation, the right to vote, the right to property and admission to professions. The contribution of John Stuart Mill to arouse feminine consciousness cannot be over-looked. In his book The Subjection of Women, he concentrated on the abilities of women and made a vigorous plea for their right to enter any trade or profession. He also pleaded for their right to practice arts and for their right to vote. He favoured for treating women
as individual that absolutely necessary for the development of the society. He was against the principal which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes- the legal subordination of one sex to the other- because it was wrong in itself, and one of the chief hindrances to human improvement. However, the credit for an organized movement for women’s rights goes to America beginning with The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Revolutions, drawn and signed at the obscure village, Seneca Falls, New York, in the Summer of 1848 supported by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott who urged men and women to work for professional and vocational equality.

After this long struggle, the right to vote was given to women in many countries as in America in 1920, in Sweden in 1921, in England in 1928 and in India with its freedom in 1947. The political scope of feminism was broadened by the impact of Marxist ideology, which made the women challenge sexism along with capitalism for both encouraged the patriarchal setup. Virginia Woolf’s book *A Room of One’s Own* could be taken as the first forceful modern tract on feminism, although she resented being labeled as a feminist. Several of her opinions were later formulated by feminists in terms of theories. Far from being a marginalized movement till the 1950s, feminism made a dramatic comeback with its frontal attack on male devised orthodoxies regarding female nature, capacities and roles. It grew out of the campaign for equal rights and against racism.

The Second Wave of feminism starts in the 1960s. It questioned the preconceived assumptions about the roles that men and women should have in their life, as they mostly work to the advantage of men over women. Malti Mathur writes in an article about the domestic role that is given to a woman:

The home was her Karma bhoomi and for a woman to aspire to a life
beyond the limits of the home was considered heresy of the worst kind... The Lakshman rekha of Hindu Mythology through which Lakshmana seeks to limit Sita's movement in the outside world is both a physical and psychological boundary as it sets out the markers within which a woman may operate. The consequences of crossing the rekha, of transgression in a patriarchal world, are there for all to see as Sita is abducted by the demon king Ravana and carried away to his island-kingdom. The rekha so etched out can be seen as a restraining concept that operates in all cultures and civilization, not restricted to the Indian ethos alone.  

The feminists felt that women had been poor victims of male oppression and exploitation, and expressed anger and strong resentment against injustice done to women. In literary texts feminist theory brings to scrutiny the portrayal of gender roles, which intends to impose social norms, customs, conventions, laws and expectations on the grounds of gender discrimination. Feminists throw a challenge to the age long tradition of gender differentiation. They do not agree with this view that women are different from men since their birth as Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* (1949):

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in a society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... which is described as ‘Feminine.’”

These feminists consider woman as the construction of patriarchal society, so they are called constructivists. They demand equality and try to demolish the wall that is constructed to make a division between men and women where men are considered superior to women. Feminists noticed that everywhere women are
disadvantaged so there is a need to demand for all advantages given only to men. The term Radical Feminism has been used for them because they gave priority to the concepts of sexual politics and the dialectic of sex and this movement was different from the earlier movements, such as the suffrage movement which was mainly concerned with equal rights. Radical feminists discuss women’s oppressed position in the family and work place, as well as gender-role stereotyping. They analyse the political significance of lesbianism. They present critique of male violence and power such as rape, battery, pornography etc. their political analysis is based on the concept of patriarchy since it reveals the importance of male dominance and dialectic of sex in every walk of life.

These radical feminists consider marriage as an organized rape whereas Betty Friedan wants to seek fulfillment within marriage. Betty Friedan, in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), writes, “For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, and self-actualization as important as the sexual need.”

The aggressive face of feminism gave a jolt to the patriarchal system. Women defied the institution of marriage and motherhood. They considered their biological capability of production as the cause of their disadvantages. Now women were not ready to perform their duties as wives or mothers but wanted to live as individuals. They argue for a more active role for themselves and are not satisfied with parasitical position in the family. Many areas of society are in existence where women can work with experience and efficiency which are in no way inferior to those of their male counterparts. With the development of economy, new disciplines are coming up where they can fit in themselves with equal proficiency. Demand for women’s having control over their fertility is also gaining momentum. The idea that
women’s role in society must be determined by their biological capacity is being challenged on the ground that despite differences inherent in their physique, essential similarities must not be overlooked and a single aspect of their totality must not be emphasized. They contributed a new vocabulary like ‘consciousness raising’, ‘male chauvinism’ (that women’s need and capabilities are inferior to those of men) ‘sexist’ (to prejudice role by gender) ‘sex object’ (woman a pleasure thing for man) and ‘full humanity’. These feminist advocated the need for the reorganization of society and gender roles. They also maintained that all this could be achieved only when women were united. Hence, emerged the concept of ‘sisterhood’ which means that women must be friends. According to Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, sisterhood is more than this. Women should redefined the values and status of personal experience. Gradually the personal becomes the political which means that women’s oppression can be analysed through their private experiences. The extreme efforts made by radical feminists were to discard all differences in dress and demeanor, personal adornment, sexual initiative and the allocate of homemaking and parental duties. They also stressed the need of leading the androgynous life.

Feminism has assumed different configurations in relation to post-modernist approaches. Present day feminist theorists believe that strictly speaking feminism is an impossible position. The agonistic definition of feminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist operation. Such an oppositional definition posits feminism as the necessary resistance to patriarchal power. Logically then the aim of feminism as an emancipator theory becomes to abolish itself along with its opponent. As Toril Moi has said that in a non-sexist, non-patriarchal society, feminism will no longer exist. The very concept of equality has undergone tremendous change in the light of the new French feminist theories of *difference*. 
The French post-modernist theory of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze has been used. The struggle for equal rights historically and politically emphasizes the value of women as they are. But in the situation of women’s lack of equal rights this value must be located as difference, not as equality. When feminism asserts the value of women as women, then it truly and efficiently counters the systematic devaluation of women under patriarchy. Equality and difference, articulated in isolation, runs the risk of echoing the very patriarchal prejudices against which the champions of equality are struggling. Accepting the constraining logic of sameness and difference, Julia Kristeva suggests a third space for feminism to operate- the space which deconstruct all identities, all binary oppositions. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s In Other Worlds: Essay in Cultural Politics (1987) admirably develops a materialistic anti-imperialistic feminism which draws on the insights of recent poststructuralist and postmodern theory. Her textual strategy for instance is to make different discourses critically ‘interrupt’ each other in order to bring each other in crisis.

But after 1980s, this radical phase of feminism plays out and feminism adopts a calm and composed manner for its denial of the patriarchal system, with a sane and serene approach. This is called the Third Wave of feminism. It lays emphasis on individual woman's inner freedom and awakening, a resolving of the issues and problems raised by feminists and on understanding the relationship of interdependence between man and woman. Now the “equality of sexes” refers to recognizing and learning to live with individual differences and identities. It is the “mutual understanding” between men and women and the acknowledgment and management of individual differences. The idea of “gender free” structure of society sounds ideal, but it is not exactly so, as felt by feminists later on. It was realized that
though biological differences are inevitable, yet gender-differences can be managed by certain readjustment.

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 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; the contradictory state of affairs also 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 concept of womanhood prevailed. Dr. Sonia Jain quotes Sri Aurobindo in “Feminism and Indian English Fiction”:

“In India the institution of slavery was practically absent and the woman had at first and more dignified position than in Greece and Rome, but the slave was soon replaced by the proletariat, called in India the Shudra, and the increasing tendency to deny the highest benefits of common life and culture to the Shudra and the woman brought Indian society to the level of
western conquerors. There was an attempt at resurrection of the high condition of woman in our society (and the process is still going on) following the introduction of western education, Reformist Movements; promotion of women’s institutions, Freedom Movements and so on with India acquiring an identity of her own, chances were made available for women to acquire their own identities.\(^7\)

The British rule introduced new ideas about women’s roles and capabilities and these ideas were adopted by enlightened Indians. In 1917 Secretary for India Edwin Montague announced the British government’s intention of including more Indians in the governing process. He with Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, planned a tour of India. Hearing the proposed tour, Saraladevi Chaudhurani applied for a appointment for the members of the Bharat Stri Mahamandal to discuss women’s educational needs. Sarojini Naidu, an Indian poetess and long-time Congress worker led an all-India delegation of prominent women to meet with Montague and Chlemsford. She spoke on behalf of women’s suffrage at the special session of Congress held in Bombay. She advocated for the franchise to women as rational, scientifically and politically sound, compatible with tradition and consistent with the human rights. Referring to the objection that politics would make women less feminine, she promised:

Never, never, for we realize that men and women have their separate goals, separate destinies and that just as man can never fulfill the responsibilities or destiny of a woman, a woman cannot fulfill the responsibility of man….We ask for the vote, not that we might interfere with you in your official functions, your civil duties, your public place and power, but rather that we might lay foundation of national character in the souls of the
children that we hold upon our laps, and instill into them the ideals of national life.  

After much struggle, Bombay and Madras were the first provinces to extend the franchise to women in 1921; the United Provinces followed in 1923; Punjab and Bengal in 1926 and Assam, the Central Provinces, and Bihar and Orissa in 1930. With independence all Indian women were given Franchise.

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.

Such time of 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 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, the work place, child bearing and 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 the 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 or 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 not 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 them 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 that is “gender” leads to designation 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. As Meena Kelkar and Deepti Gangavane write in “Identity, Freedom and Empowerment: Some theoretical Reflections”:

“The identities, seen as conventional descriptions based on ontological resemblances then do not become rigid and determinate like essences. They remain fluid, plastic, and capable of being moulded and remoulded in the changing contexts of needs, interest and purposes.”

A close analysis of her five novels reveals Kapur’s preoccupation with identity. She has herself said in an interview with Ira Pande, “the mother-daughter nexus is only one of the many manifestations of the Indian woman’s roles: she is wife, a
mother, a daughter-in-law-infact there are so many aspects of a woman’s life that I still need to write about that”\textsuperscript{10}. It all comes as we read her novels starting from \textit{Difficult Daughters} to the last novel \textit{Custody}. 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. As bell hooks writes:

Women who were opposed to patriarchy, capitalism, classism or racism labeled themselves “feminist”. Their expectations were varied. Privileged women wanted social equality with men of their class; some women wanted equal pay for equal work; others wanted an alternative lifestyle.\textsuperscript{11}

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.
References:


