CONCLUSION

Among the writers who have portrayed the ‘new woman’ who is inclined to take the ‘road not taken’ and walking on their ‘own road’, Manju Kapur undoubtedly arrests attention”

(PCWW p.106).

Kapur’s fiction stresses on the woman’s need for self fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, independence individuality and self actualization. “I am interested” says Kapur,

“In the lives of women, whether in the political areas or in domestic spaces. One of main preoccupations in all my books is how women manage to negotiate both inner and outer spaces in their lives- what sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning and at what cost to their personal lives do they find some kind of fulfillment outside the home”

(TH p.106).

Manju Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Striking a balance between a natural co-existence and unfettered freedom and space on the other, Kapur’s eloquent narration of women’s issues is nevertheless, both Indian and universal. Kapur says,

“No, there is nothing just to happen about that, I do write about women. I find women’s lives fascinating, the way they have to negotiate public and private space. They have to do many things, they have to play so many roles, there’s a lot of stuff to say about women. And it is also what I know”.
Manju Kapur is one Indian writer who prefers reality to magic realism and recreates an intimate world where

"family group sleep in the open air on the roof and wash themselves in the yard ............. where love making is furtive and urgent because another wife may be listening and women's lives more to a complete pornography of cooking, washing weaving and mending, growing, picking, chopping and blending."

Sensitivity threads the events that form these books. These are so naturally written that along the way one forgets these are the works of fiction. It feels more like a lifetime unraveling in front of our eyes, with real people in it, experiencing happiness, sorrow, pleasure and pain.

The writer's sensitivity is reflected even in the issue that whether or not a girl has the right to make her own choices in life is an issue dragged this way and that, for a long time in our country. Facing equal assault from the chauvinists who declare that woman's place is inside the house, and feminists who condemn the idea of taking the husband's surname after marriage, the idea finds a middle path here. There is after all a difference between possessing and protecting. The books deal with the idea of education for a girl for her sake, not just to enable her to land a suitable match.

Today is not the day following yesterday. Things might have changed, but how much really? Even today, thousands of girls sit within the four walls of their houses and wonder why they do not have the right to choose their own lives, decides for themselves whether
they want to be home makers or more. Marriage is still the reason for their birth. Freedom is more than just being aloud out for a pizza with friends. Manju Kapur comments on her area of writing

"I am exploring the space that women occupy in domestic relationship. It is a world I know and understand. The mother-daughter nexus is only one of the many manifestations of Indian woman’s role. She is a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law in fact; there are so many aspects of a woman’s life she still need to write about that”\(^5\).

"I was nothing, husbandless, childless, I felt myself hovering like pencil notation on the margins of society”\(^6\).

This statement by Ida, the narrator in Manju Kapur’s novel "Difficult Daughters" summarize the concern of self identity at conflict with socio-cultural identity, which pervades Indian women writing.

Her visit to Dalhousie imposes on Virmati certain aspect of feminism. Virmati could never share her feelings with Kasturi. As a child she keeps craving for a little understanding from her mother but with the passing of time she learns to accept the situation as it is. This mother daughter relationship marches from identification to alienation. Years later Ida the daughter of Virmati relives her relation with her mother, marching from alienation to identification. Thus the novel presents the paradigm of two mother daughter relationships.

The centre of the narrative we see a woman, Virmati who fights but shows that what happens to her is the representative destiny of Indian woman. She even gets the idea of her third novel from her real life, Kapur says,
"I teach in a girls college (Miranda House College, Delhi) and 'Home' was first conceived in response to the home situations of some of my students who came from conservative background. The family, I write about has had to rebuild its prosperity, having lost everything in the partition. This makes them especially vigilant that much of the family ethos is dominated by the market place."

Kapur does a wonderful job dissecting the everyday of an ordinary life, showing how even the ordinary in this generation can be claustrophobic. Kapur’s women were made to believe that anything outside the small world created for them was not normal.

Thus a woman should basically strive towards a fine interdependent partnership. But if she feels suffocated, then voice ought to be raised and there should be a total breaking away, like Ida. But merely transcending societal norms is not enough. A woman should be aware, self controlled, strong willed, self reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.

Thus Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters is a feminist discourse not because she is writing about women but because she “has understood a woman both as a woman and a person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible contexts.” She presents feminism at its most sane, keeping in mind the Indian content.

Kapur’s fiction stresses on the woman’s need for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, and a fight against her own destiny, independence individuality and self-actualization.
The age old respect for the Laws of Manu still dictates the position of woman within the family. The popular saying: "Women drive their status from their husbands and power from their sons" has its full meaning. It is the narrow margin that separates the grand mother, regarded as a saint by the whole joint family of which she has eventually become the spiritual leader from an ordinary woman who, throughout her life willingly slaved for men. Since her very position within the family makes her pillar of society. The central part played by women in traditional India can not be challenged. Questioning the position of women comes to questioning the structure of Indian society.

Women are presented as victims, which in keeping with the spirit of the time, leads to some sort of rebellion. A mention must finally be made of Anglo-Indian women, a difficult status to assume in those days. Narayan insists upon this attachment to tradition to make the reader aware of the fact that, In India, not only has men every right but they also have edited moral duties. Here I want to give a reference of Narayan’s novel ‘Dark Room’:

“As far me I never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time in my life. I might have suggested an alternative, but nothing more. What he does is right. It is a wife’s duty to feel so” *(DR p.42)*.

India owed its spiritual eminence to the fact that the people here realized that a woman’s primary duty was being a wife and a mother. Nisha leaves her business to fulfill her duties as a good wife, a daughter-in-law and mother. Ganga plays all the role of a maid to take care of her husband.
In our society, a woman on her way can not survive outside the system in which a place has been assigned to her, a woman can not manage. Indian society does not tolerate individualism, except in the case of Sanyasihood. Feminine individualism is not acceptable. Here we can have an example of Shakuntala, Virmati or Nisha. Shakuntala does not want to marry, she lives a free life. But due to her, her mother suffers a lot and feels helpless. Virmati denies marrying Inderjeet and this becomes a big reason of her helpless condition. And even in the marriage, her qualities, her education are not enough. Even if the girl is good-looking, entry in a respectable house is difficult.

To Narayan, the answer was not only in education,

"It is all nonsense to say that woman’s salvation lies in education. It does not improve their lot a bit. It leaves them as badly unemployed as the man" (DR. p.46).

It has become clear what would be the result of women’s education in a society where individual freedom is strictly limited. Education contributes to the social promotion of a girl only in as much as it allows her family to find her a better husband, education is not an end in itself but a long term investment.

This is what Manju Kapur has depicted in her novels women’s emancipation is no longer to be decided upon by men. It is no longer up to them to decide what a woman can be or not. Manju Kapur’s novels show the condition of woman in our society. Through the girl or woman is from a respectable family, good-looking, well-educated still she has to suffer. She remains in the society like a puppet whose strings are in the hands of their destiny. These characters try to liberate themselves from the pangs of orthodoxy but they remain
unable to come out of their family, whether their paternal home or in-law home, they have to remain dependent or others. They can’t take decisions on their own but the decisions of others are enforced on these characters. All the female characters rebel against society or patriarchal norms to make their own destiny but unfortunately, the condition become worse for them.

Manju Kapur teaches in a respectable girl’s college where she gets the themes of her novels. She feels inspired by those girls. She creates those situations in a realistic way. In our real life also we feel helpless in front of our destiny. Manju Kapur speaks of the idea of independence—independence aspired to and obtained by a nation and also independence yearned after by a woman. Here, a personal jouissance, a woman’s self expression is put in a marginal position.

"Over the past decade, in fiction and autobiography, South Asian woman have begun to explore the stories of their pasts in an efflorescence of writings. Among others, Mrinal Pande, Manju Kapur and Suguna Iyer have accomplished this through the medium of fiction, while Sara Suleri, Yasmin Alibhai Brown and Mira Kamdar stand out their memories”.12

Based partially on the life of Kapur’s own mother the novel movingly evokes the multiple frustration encountered by a woman and the effects of destiny on the women’s life.

Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters is a story of a girl from a wealthy and distinguished family residing in Lahore before Independence. Virmati’s mother, Kasturi is educated too. Though Kasturi and other family members believe in education for girls, also opine that girls must be married off at the completion of necessary education.
Girls are not encouraged for higher studies and selecting a carrier or a life partner for themselves. However, shakuntala, Virmati’s cousin, is a M.Sc. in Chemistry and works at Lahore College. She is strong-willed and career oriented. She is self-assured and cherishes the idea of being something other than wife. In an intimate conversation, she tells Virmati:

Here we are fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry and nothing else.

Shankuntala always inspire virmati, the protagonist, t think above the rested interest and get involved and light for social and national cause. She says:

Time are changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?.

Virmati too often marvels at the ways of Shakuntala, her cousin and has all appreciation for her, when virmati comes to know that Shakuntala reads papers, attends seminars and travels with her friends Virmati replies.

I want to be like you, Pehnji.

This reflects that the seeds for aspiration and emancipation are already lying there in the heart of the protagonist even much before she meets Harish, the professor. We find the novelist speaking the protagonist’s mind in the very ensuing paragraph:

It was useless looking for answers inside the Home. One had to look outside. To education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore Colleges.
As the story proceeds, we are apprised of the fact that Virmati, the representative of pre-independent India is not granted the freedom to pursue her studies. As a corollary, the task of shaping her future lies in her own hands. She feels awfully bad when she fails her F.A. and her parents start looking for a match for her but she insists on reappearing in the F.A. exams and starts studying in the college. Harish, the professor’s neighbor who makes her understand his need for companionship, in reality takes interest in her as a beautiful female being. Manju kapur while describing the classroom scene writers:

Ignoring the half-dozen young men who rose to five her their place, Virmati sat on the floor in front of his desk, looking up at him with large eyes. The professor drank in the symbolism of her postare greedily.

Further, in last line of chapter VIII Manju Kapur remarks the following where she informs the readers how Virmati finally get embroiled in professor’s wily predilection:

But by then, the professor’s desire to possess had extended to her heart and mind.

Culture where individualism has often remained an alien idea and marital bless—the women’s role at home is a central focus. Dora Sales Salvador (356), in her note to her Spanish translation of the novel, appropriately stresses: "Kapur emphasises the efforts made at that time by numerous women who, while demanding equal opportunities, equal access to education and life-opportunities going beyond convention, were a visible force in the non-violent resistance to the British".
Likewise Christopher Rollason (2004) comments that the search for control over one’s destiny, surely the key theme of *Difficult Daughters*, refers to the Independence aspired to and obtained by a nation (despite its cruel division by a fateful Partition), but also to the independence yearned after (and finally not obtained) by a woman and member of that same nation (or of one of its rival communities).

Manju Kapur, in her novels, presents women who try to establish their own identity. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati, in her quest for identity, who is also the central character of the novel, rebels against tradition. She is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. Mrs. Kapur herself asserts that "conflict between mother and daughter is inevitable and I suppose I was a difficult daughter. The conflict carries on through generation because mothers want their daughters to be safe. We want them to make the right choices—"right in the sense that they are socially acceptable. My mother wanted me to be happily married; I want my daughters to have good jobs"."* (DD. p.107)

The very title of the novel *'Difficult Daughters'* is an indication to the message that a woman, who tries in search of an identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well.

Indian society is a patriarchal one. Women under the patriarchal pressure and control were subjected to much more brunt’s and social ostracism. They were discriminated and were biased in lien of their sex. In patriarchal system, man is the legal head of the family or state coincided with the weakening of female–female bond and especially the dissolution of mother-daughter relationship (Irigaray 30). Irigaray further comments that such a system ensured that property and
children belonged to the same genealogy. The same life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society is reflected in *Difficult Daughters*. The conflict for autonomy and separate identity remains an unfinished combat in *Difficult Daughters*.

Thus, Manju Kapur has dealt with mind and the soul of protagonist, her inner workings and hidden and silent thoughts rather than her appearance.

With the advent of freedom for the country, it can be easily comprehended that the man who talks about freedom dogmatically, does not provide liberty to his wife who bore the pangs and suffering of keeping the child in her womb for nine months even for such a trivial matter like keeping the name of the new born child of her choice.

Virmati who has sacrificed so much in her life to marry Harish is insouciant of her own identity. I believe that it is Virmati who has taken the first steps towards the journey of women liberation from the clutches of the egotist male society but her daughter Ida takes this voyage to culmination. She vehemently opposes male-supremacy and wishes to exercise her right to equality. She clearly repudiates the role of being victims at the hands of dominating males of the society. Ida is able to sense clearly that women need to staunchly believe in the strength of their womanhood if they want the world to recognize their existence. When Ida remarks, "**The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother**". She probable means just by defying the patriarchal uphold, women cannot achieve their self the way her mother did. She recognizes her mother’s weaknesses, but while trac- ing her life events, she becomes aware of the pugnacity that Virmati undergoes for creating a space for herself. She acknowledges this fact
in the concluding paragraph of the novel where she says:

"This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be." Perhaps Ida has dedicated the work to her mother as it is about her. And she asks her mom to leave her, as she needs to take u the journey ahead in a bolder way."

Thus Manju Kapur has written with immense concern and understanding for her female characters, particularly Virmeti. The suppressed and subjugated world of Indian women comes to full light in the character of her protagonist. She dexterously delineates all kinds of visible and invisible pressures that kept Indian women suffocated for long. I feel in a very symbolic manner Manju Kapur puts the whole story against the backdrop of Indian freedom movement. Like Anita Dessai and Shashi Deshpande, manju Kapur can be considered a prose rhapsodist of female sentiments, feelings and emotions through human conscientious awareness. She can be termed as one of the most powerful forerunners of women’s emancipation movement on Indian soil.

Manju shares thoughts and experience of her. "Simple" is an overused term from the critic’s lexicon, but it sits very well with the work of Manju Kapur. The cozy, unthreatening titles of her novels (A Married Woman, Home, Difficult Daughters), their linear plots and the stillness of her prose conceal an acute understanding of social hypocrisies. Though her work is not judgmental in tone, it’s uncommonly perceptive about human foibles. She can write lucid, conversation-driven
narratives about joint families while also making sharp observations about the inconstancy of people and their relationships, as well as the subtler points of self-deception in a tradition-soake society.

Kapur herself is on an indefinite sabbatical from her job teaching English at Miranda College, and now divides her time between her home and the library of the Delhi Gymkhana, where she goes to write. Her own straightforward explanation for the nuances, almost anthropological quality of her work is that it comes from a lifetime of studying and teaching literature. "Literature by women, about families, always has these larger considerations", she says:

"With years of studying texts, it becomes almost second nature to look beneath the surface— at social and economic forces, gender relationships and how they are played out in an arena that, in my writing, happens to be the home. But then, all sorts of things happening outside do affect what is happening inside the home."16

This in turn meant adding to his back-story, and numerous revisions were required before the final structure of the book emerged. It isn’t surprising then to learn that Kapur’s laptop contains dozens of files with multiple drafts of her novels. "I’m very good at cutting", she says, "Fast and ruthless." It all began when one of the many publishers who rejected her first novel Difficult Daughters sent back a note that said, "It meanders too much". Kapur shortles as she remembers how "that one words, 'meanders' inspired me to cut 30,000 words from the manuscript!"17 It was painful initially, she admits, but after eight years of not being published, the pain of
cutting was much smaller than the pain of not being published at all.

"I chose the lesser pain!"

Since Kapur’s work is characterized by a grounded, no-flourishes writing style, I’m surprised to learn that she was quite the experimenter in her early days. "When I first started writing stories and poems", she says:

"magic realism was all the rage, thanks in large part to Rushdie. I tried to write like that but in my hands it seemed inauthentic and labored, and so I gave it up. Intuitively, I took the raasta of not standing between the reader and the story– I wanted to make it as transparent and seamless as possible."

Her first book originally had footnotes, a story within a story "and lots of other stuff I thought was very innovative– but it all had to go eventually!"18

She also has a reputation for being a reticent writer; regulars at the ever-increasing book-launch parties in the capital would have a hard time placing her. Given this, what does she think about the recent developments in Indian publishing, such as the elevation of media-savvy young writers to pop-celebrity status even before their books are out? "It’s hard for me to see writing as a social stepping stone", she says:

"It’s such a solitary activity, whereas being in society means being gregarious. Of course, younger people have more energy, and if they can party and write, good for them. But if it interferes with your writing, I would say just don’t do it. As
a writer, you have to serve your art, old-fashioned as it may sound— and personally I do this by not meeting anyone!"  

She explains, "And it had become difficult to write and work at the same time". Earlier, when she was teaching, the way she wrote was dictated by term time and holiday time. “During holidays I would do the huge revisions, shaping, tightening, and trying to bring together everything in my head. During term time, when my head was full of teaching, I would work on first drafts. You need to put down those words in the first place. That would be easier to do, to come home and just write 500 or 1,000 words that could subsequently be modified. But the fashioning, or making the thing into an artistic coherent whole” –she waves her hands around and rises her voice dramatically as she speaks these last four words, aware of how affected they sound—"that could only be done during the holidays".

Manju Kapur’s “Home” is a masterful novel of the acts of kindness, compromise, and secrecy that lie at the heart of every family. Home is a story about an Indian family; Manju Kapur weaves universal truths about the complexities of extended families and the pull of tradition against modernity.

Nisha, the seemingly docile central character of Home, claims her space halfway through the novel when she demands an education. But life at university offers little more than cribs to help with her exams. More significantly, she has a clandestine romance with the boy who acquires them. But this is India, and the boy’s unsuitable. Nisha has to find an alternative occupation, putting to use her entrepreneurial genes. From these few bricks, Manju Kapur creates a novel full of
bright spaces and dark corners; her telling is brisk, unsentimental, and capable of turning domestic drama into suspense.

Thus we see that era of subjugation is gone and the women have started asserting themselves. They are no longer traditional Sita’s or Savitri’s. The characters are portrayed in this novel rebel against their parents and the society and are successful in their struggle against the oppressive mechanism of a closed society. The concept of feminism in Indian society varies from the one in the West and therefore, Manju Kapur has tried to evolve her own stream of feminism grounded in reality. She has her own concerns, priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the predicamant of her women protagonists. Her novels make a significant contribution in this direction.

In all the three novels, cited above, we notice that a woman’s first encounter with her body becomes a significant point of departure for her. The female body is always at a disadvantage. The woman is either silent about her sexuality as in ‘Home’ or defiant as in ‘Difficult Daughters’ or rebel as in ‘A Married Woman’. For a woman, sexuality is a domain of restriction, danger and repression. It can also be argued that sexuality becomes of a site woman’s oppression.

Grounded in cultural, religions and social traditions a woman’s body is pure as long as it is untouched by man. Elements of feminism occur when one has experienced sex.

But loss of virginity has multiple implications in women’s life. This may happen in marriage, outside marriage. This inflicts a shame in their lives. What is gratification for a man is a sin for a woman, what is desire for one is a disgrace for the other, what is amusement for one
is a scandal for the other. Various characters of Manju Kapur, Virmati, Astha and Nisha too move into this forbidden territory. It is ironical that Virmati has to face rejection first at the hand of her mother and later from her own daughter. Astha is disillusioned with her rich family setup and finds solace in the company of another woman while Nisha has to wait for a very long time in spite of all her physical and mental attainments due to astrological reasons.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid., p.106.

3. Ibid., p.106.

4. Ibid., p.106.

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6. Ibid., p.106.

7. Ibid., p.106.

8. Ibid., p.106.

9. Ibid., p.106.


11. Ibid., p.46.


17. Ibid., p.106.


19. Ibid., p.110.