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THE PSYCHIC CONDITION OF THE WOMEN PROTAGONISTS IN THE SELECT NOVELS  
OF MANJU KAPUR: A SYNOPTIC VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Manju Kapur, the novelist, who herself was an English professor, has taken up cudgels to fight for woman's cause. Her protagonists from Virmati to Nisha have chosen their independent course of life in a male dominated world. In Kapur's novels, every shade of feminism from passive, submissive to rebel feminism is presented. Manju Kapur's women protagonists are self-reliant. A very striking feature of almost all her female protagonists is that they hold education at the highest pedestal with no air of superiority or contention. The very feature that differentiates Manju Kapur's female protagonists is their attitude towards tradition and modernity. Her female protagonists have daring desires. They can do or pay anything to fulfill their desires and want to live and lead with self-confidence. In the process they do not hesitate to face the subsequent trials and tribulations offered by life. Her female protagonists like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in *A Married Woman* and Nisha in *Home* do exhibit their inner strength who were initially with shrouded identities but learned to move from the edges of unknown to known.

**Key Words:** Cudgels, Independent, Feminism, Protagonists, Tradition, Modernity, and Tribulations and Identities

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Manju Kapur, born in Amritsar in 1947, graduated from Miranda House, did her M.A. from Dalhousie University (Halifax in Canada) and M.Phil from Delhi University. She taught English Literature at Miranda House Delhi for several years and now is retired from her job. At present she lives with her family in New Delhi with her husband Gun Nidhi Dalmia. She writes about the middle class woman and her psychological problems she goes through her whole life. She has given us an unforgettable picture of the evolution of the Indian woman's psyche over time, starting from the pre-independence period through the independence era up to the time of the post-independence.

The protagonists, Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in *A Married Woman*, Nisha in *Home*, except Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, the main characters in all the other novels of Manju Kapur, married a partner of their parents' choice. Kapur states that in India modern liberated women have started to choose their own lives and to decide for themselves, whether they want to be homemakers or more.

Virmati (*Difficult Daughters*) being a positive and courageous woman of the pre-independent India opposes the tradition of arranged marriage. Her education though brought in hope of living her own life within

her traditional limitations make her fall in love with a married professor Harish. The compelling circumstances which has driven Virmati to be his second wife. Virmati represents a woman torn between age-old traditions, individual views and bonds. Later she restrains herself from the precipitous action of felling from the domestic seen. Though she felt these bonds as unreasonable in the beginning gradually learns to endure them as a typical traditional Indian woman, for she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture her family ties. At a point time, her realization that it could be wise to seek freedom without undermining her obligations and responsibilities and not to lose her identity. The story moves further bringing in the daughter of Virmati, Ida, who reflects the image of woman's condition but by denying being like her mother, acquires her own self-identity. If Kasturi, grandmother of Ida remains to be within the boundaries of tradition, Virmati moves further to realize her limitations, while Ida, is a full blown individual who seeks her own identity unbiased by any fears of patriarchy.

Astha (*A Married woman*) represents the journey of an educated woman through hope and despair. It is her journey from a simple disparate unasserted house wife. She is an individual who learns to recharge and ascertain an identity that is so independent and refreshing. Her marriage with Hemanth though makes her a mother of two children; unfortunately at every step of her married life she feels the emptiness of a loveless marriage within herself. This empty lacuna leads her to come in contact with Pipeelika a widow, and soon their loneliness turns into an intimate relationship. Later her realization, as her life is caught in a traumatic situation of not being able to remain on any of the sides leads her to reconcile herself with her family.

Astha is portrayed as an individual who seeks change from the existing con commitments of life. The problems of women are not to be seen as products of patriarchal system but they seem to be individualized. She succeeds in realizing her selfhood through her profession and proves to the world that her submission to the family system is her new found confidence to confront with reality. Thus she achieves freedom and harmony in life without comprising on her obligations and responsibilities. Astha realizes her own identity, and becomes rebellious for creating her own independent identity. But the patriarchal order slowly shapes not to be cruel and plays its role on women for not being aware their role play. Through the character of Astha which allows Indian women to shred off their hidden fears to survive as an individual and to tame their emotions as their heart desires.

Nisha is the protagonist of the novel *Home* who is caught between the clutches of age old patriarchy that hold an individual from their desired development and restricts their growth as a full bloomed individuals. It also deals with sexual abuse and domestic violence which is being perpetuated against Indian woman through the character of Nisha. Nisha is sexually harassed; burden with household duties, lack of education brings down her self- confidence which is further steeped low by her forced marriage. Kapur places a lot of emphasis on the cultural conditioning of the girl child in the Indian set up. Through the character of Nisha, the novelist explores the manner in which Indian girls are moulded to suit the needs and imperatives of a patriarchal society from a social and psychoanalytic angle. The core philosophy of traditional family is emphasised through Nisha's mother. In the process of empowering herself financially she starts her own business and continuous even after her marriage. She protests and struggles to prove her identity by shouldering her responsibilities and doing something meaningful. Finally, she seeks emancipation from the patriarchal oppression. Nisha represents the mental conflicts, the restlessness, the percipient accumulated personal screams and mental revolts of a woman.

The women protagonists in Manju Kapur's fiction fall prey to the clutches of Indian patriarchal social system; hence they are always made to feel the secondary status in any relationship with men in their life. According to Agarwal "Like many other Indian women writers, she voices the trials and tribulations of her female characters who, no doubt, recognize the primal essence of family bond but are conscious of their individuality. While living in the suffocating atmosphere of the traditional values of middle class constraints, Kapur's heroines - Virmati , Astha and Nisha , all strive to assert themselves."

Manju Kapur's women are stalked with a further lower status on account of their status as secondary citizens in their home away from home. For the migrant women, with all their riches abroad, they enjoy secondary citizenship outside their homes abroad and while at home the men in their life despite their

advanced, professional and educational set up, make them feel secondary beings as the male mind sets are shown scarcely improved to recognize independent existence and talents of the women in their life.

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