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## A Study of the Emergence of 'New Woman' in the novels of Manju Kapur

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### **Abstract:**

*The present paper attempts to study the resurrection of 'New Woman' in the novels of Manju Kapur. She in her novels has portrayed the domestic scene and all her novels have the backdrop of family. In her novels she has portrayed women as strong characters who resisted the patriarchy, male hegemony and redefined their existence. The writer also delineates how female protagonists resurrect themselves as new woman and reconstruct their lives. She has presented a truthful account of women and the various challenges they face because of old established traditions and customs.*

**Keywords:** *New woman, patriarchy, hegemony, Resistance, subjugation.*

### **Introduction:**

Manju Kapur is a prominent Indian women novelist who is concerned with the sad plight of women in India. In India suppression of women is prevalent in all families and it is a very tough task for them to overcome this burden. Manju Kapur has exposed the real plight of Indian women and so created awareness among them about their rights. In her debut novel *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati the protagonist fights against old established beliefs and male domination. Her parents are worried about her marriage and that too in the same caste. Right from her infancy her mother taught her to be a good wife and education is useless for a girl. Her life is smeared because of family responsibilities due to repeated mother's pregnancies. But her desire for education never lessens and she belongs to a typical conservative family who marries their daughters after basic education. But she is a new woman who is not ready to follow family traditions and is keen to go to Lahore for further education. She wants to have the same kind of freedom which her cousin Shakuntala is enjoying. Her meeting with Shakuntala instills desire for freedom and she wishes to live her life in her own way. She wants to be like her cousin as she says, "I want to be like you, Pehnji, If there are two of us, then they will

not mind so much.” (*Difficult Daughters* 17) She further says while emphasizing her modern views, “It was useless looking for answer inside the home. One had to look outside. To education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore colleges.” (*Difficult Daughters* 17)

She is very much committed for her education, she believes that she can make her life better only through education, and if she has to change her fortune it is only possible through education. But it is not easy for her as she belongs to a typical conservative family who consider it against their family rules. Virmati says, “She too had to go to Lahore, even if she had to fight her mother who was so sure that her education was practically over. (*Difficult Daughters* 19) She is a new woman because she decides to pursue her education which is against her family traditions, but she strongly believes that to make her status better is possible only through education and also only way to become socially and economically independent. In College she falls in love with an English Professor Harish although she is engaged with a canal engineer but Harish used his skill and talent in persuading her and with this major crisis in her life starts. Professor Harish is a selfish man as he is married but forming relation with Virmati is simply to use her body for sexual purposes as she is an innocent girl having no experience of outside world. She realizes his intentions when he refuses to marry her, she emerges a new woman with courage and conveys her decision to Professor Harish in a letter as, “If I was to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed, then I didn’t want to live.” (*Difficult Daughters* 92)

Her focus is on education now and she is very much impressed by her roommate Swarna Lata who is a modern activist, she wants to be like her. “This is what is going on around me. This is the life I should involve in. Not useless love and doubtful marriage.” (*Difficult Daughters* 134) Her love for Professor Harish is a tragic flaw in her life but she is steadfast to pull her back from Harish’s trap. To make herself socially and financially independent she joins a school as Principal in Nehan and became busy with teaching and administration of the school. But Harish visits her frequently and ultimately both marries against the wishes of her family. No doubt she goes against family traditions but she asserts her freedom in choosing her life partner, she has her own life and she knows best how to live her life. She is rejected by her family, friends and relatives but she asserts her freedom, she emerges an a new woman who don’t follow old traditions and customs, she asserts her freedom at every stage in her life.

In *A married Woman*, Astha is a young woman but due to family traditions she is not allowed to choose her life partner. Her father chooses a life partner for her, completely ignores her will only to save his family reputation due to her affair with young boys. Her parents have followed family traditions and expects the same from her daughter as her mother says, “When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know that shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter? Married, they will be condemned with perpetual rebirth.” (*A married Woman* 1) Her

mother believes in patriarchy and acts as a patriarchal force unlike her father who desires her daughter to have a successful career. She thinks in modern ways, she believes that salary gives women economic independence, protects identity and saves women's psyche. At one time with her husband she wishes to buy a silver box but Hemant refuses and says women who are dependent need not to buy anything and have to sacrifice their wishes. She says, "I also earn. Can't buy a box if I want, even if it is a little overpriced? You earn! Snorted Hemant. What you earn now that is really something, yes, that will pay for this holiday." (*A married Woman* 164) She realizes that in a patriarchal society women are considered spendthrift and are not consulted when something is bought or sold. It is her education which gives her courage to raise questions against these rules, she wants to be treated equal with her husband but he is not willing to do so.

Her husband's domineering behaviour made her sick and who married her with the sole intention that she will do all household duties. When Astha told him why don't you marry an American girl as you lived and got higher education there, his answer shows his deep belief in patriarchy despite his education in western country. He remarks:

I had responsibilities to my parents. I am the only son, and I wanted someone who would fit in with our family life. American women are too demanding. Their men have to cater to all their whims and fancies. (*A Married Woman* 40)

This clearly shows that he needs someone who will work as an unpaid worker in his family and will also sacrifice her dreams and wishes for his family, this not only widens the gulf between them but she is drawn towards Pipee in a lesbian relationship. When she fails to receive love, care from her husband she seeks the same thing in a lesbian relationship, although she is mother of two children. She is attached emotionally and physically with Pipee and is not ready to give up this relationship, although it is unacceptable in a society. She finds a perfect match with her and thinks such relationship is the need of the hour, she says, "Astha thought that if husband and wife are one person, then Pipee and she were even more so. She had shared parts of herself she had never shared before. She felt complete with her." (*A married Woman* 241) She is ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of Pipee but is not willing to end her relationship with Pipee. Her parents ignore her wishes and finds a man who is unsuitable for her, and she is forced to seek love and care from someone. She is a strong minded woman who searches her freedom and identity and she rejects the patriarchal values which limits her freedom. She is not like traditional Indian women who sacrifices her freedom and identity for the sake of family and husband, she emerges as a new woman with new ideas who seeks her soul mate and enters in socially forbidden relationship.

She develops this unnatural relationship with Pipee because of her marital dissatisfaction, extreme domineering behaviour from Hemant and absence of male partner. They both are mentally detached from their respective families and a growing intimacy grows between them. In a patriarchal

society there are different rules for men and women, if a man is having an extramarital relationship he is not punished severely but if woman is found she is punished strictly and not accepted in society. Her relationship with Pipee ends when she gets scholarship in America for her research, Astha is an educated girl who has knowledge about various things she emerges as a new woman who does not follow old traditions. It is because of patriarchal atmosphere at home she suffers, she is forced to marry a man who ignores her dreams and considers marriage a mere sexual activity and wife a mere commodity. Astha says to her husband:

You think marriage is just sex

Of course I don't. What do you want that I don't give you?

Interest. Togetherness. Respect.

Baby, I respect you, said Hemant soothingly,

You are my wife. As for togetherness, that's just what I want.'

(*A married Woman* 274)

It is highlighted in the novel that in present changing times such relationships will emerge when we neglect women's freedom. Astha emerges as a new woman who searches her freedom and soul mate but didn't surrender in front of her domineering husband. Manju Kapur beautifully other significant issues like communal disturbance in society and a much controversial topic like lesbian relation of woman. Therefore *A married Woman* presents multi dimensional view of woman's life and society.

In Manju Kapur's *Home*, Nisha is another girl who faces discrimination in her own family because of being a girl, she is treated as inferior to her brother Raja and is not allowed to pursue higher education. She is criticized by her own family members for her interest in pursuing higher education. Her mother Sona herself faces same kind of discrimination but ironically she allows same the same thing to flourish in her house. Her mother told her that, "People are suspicious of brides who are very educated. Too many ideas make it difficult to adjust." (*Home* 140) She finally succeeds in persuading her parents to be allowed to pursue higher education. Her college life was an adventurous journey as she became modern and bold in her taking decisions. She saw other girls in the college with different dresses and in following them she cuts her long hair which her mother had called precious for woman.

She had a relation with Suresh that didn't last long because of his selfish nature and that too was a big setback in her life, but she is a new woman who didn't surrender her identity. She joins a school as teacher but soon quits that job because she wants to do something in her life. She decides to start a business but it is an odd idea for a woman living in patriarchal society but she is strong minded and she finally persuaded her father. She became a successful business woman and a source

of inspiration for all women who want to start something of their own. She put the name 'Nisha Creations' and it earned fame in all stores in Delhi. Nisha has become economically independent but she wishes to become independent in matrimony also. In other words she wants to marry that person only who will have no problem with his business or will allow her to work. Her family finds a person Arvind, a widower who says he has no problem with his business. After her marriage she is very conscious of her identity as well as her business. Nisha emerges as a new woman who does not surrender her freedom but emerges as a new woman with new hopes and her business became source of inspiration for many girls who too want to start something of their own but are afraid of society, Nisha shows them the right path.

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