

Portrayal Of Women In Manju Kapur's Novels

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Abstract

This Paper endeavours to study the Role of Women in the selected Novels of Manju Kapur. This study proposes to attempt a detailed study and draw inferences which might offer a fresh perspective to this topic. Indian writing in English has undergone a lot of changes since its beginning. From being a foreign language, English over the time has been adapted and modified. It is no longer the administrative language but has become almost like a mother tongue for many Indians. Through these authors, it has been proven time and time again that English is no longer an alien language it used to be once upon a time. Manju Kapur's novels focus on female protagonists struggling to break the shackles of patriarchy and are in quest of identity against the dogmas of social and cultural critical thinking. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's preoccupation writing has been portrayal of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationship. They have to exist subjected to patriarchy. Manju Kapur is a post-colonial writer who intuitively perceives the situation of women in male dominated society

Key Words: culture, female, identity, patriarchy, human relationship, society, women

Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed phenomenal success in women's writings in Indian English literature. Indian women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Bharati Mukherjee, Shobha De, Namita Gokhle, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Manju Kapur and others have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women as their main thematic concerns. These women novelists describe the whole world of women with stunning frankness. Their write-up gives glimpses of the unexplored female psyche, which had no accessibility previously. For this reasons I have chosen Manju Kapur's novels for my research work. She is a novelist. She has written five full length novels to this date. She has given remarkable role of women through her novels. This paper will focus on the role of women as portrayed by Manju Kapur in her novels.

Manju kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998), it has got appreciation from alltype of readers. In South Asia, *Difficult Daughters* is the first best book so it awarded the Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1999. *A Married Woman* (2003) is the second novel to her. It brings much more attention for her. *Home* (2006) is the third novel of her. *The Immigrant* (2009) is the fourth novel. *Custody* (2012) is the fifth novel of the novelist. These five novels have a background of urban in nature and catch the city life with sarcastic aloofness. The different significances of modifies human relationship between men and women have been symbolized with detail and graphic surveillance in all her novels. Her works have a unique tone of universalization.

Kapur's novels show the lives of women portraying their fight for basic rights, longing for their own identity and

survival. With the help of education the protagonists are become aware of their self-reliance. It also helps them to walk on new horizon. They have considerable liberty of expression and thoughts. In each and every field they not only compete with men but also work efficiently like their male counter parts. Manju Kapur is talented with a fine faculty of creative perception. The pragmatic presentation of life in all novels impresses every one. She plays the role of a natural observer in her works. She highlights the negative aspect and the behavior of the existing society. Through her novels, she conveys the message that people should rise above the petty man-made barriers of caste, religion and culture and should imbibe the spirit of love and fraternity. She attempts to show her concerns at the growing tendency of unrest in our society caused by man's attempt to exploit man for selfish gains and motives. She, in fact, shows her keen interest in the relationship of individual and society and then searches the possibilities and mechanisms of change in the individual resulting in society at large. Her investigation and presentation of human consciousness are directed towards an objective account of human's emotions assessing Indian confrontation with reality. Her novels are not propaganda for reforms but they represent the ambivalence of change. To give realistic touch to her observation, Kapur does not idealize or glorify but presents the life as it is, with its variegated canvas. Jealousies, intrigues, petty, quarrels, and rivalries are there, but at the same time there is goodness, patient sufferings and heroic endurance and living faith in a benevolent God too.

Manju Kapur stands as a voice of women through her feminist writings, presents the character of Nina in *The Immigrant* who strives for her own liberation and attains a voyage of self-identity in the foreign country, Canada. Her failure in a love affair obligates her to live lonely in Delhi. Nina has to marry with NRI dentist living in Canada. Nina, who is born and brought up in Indian culture shifts to Canada with her husband where she becomes unsuccessful to cope up with the culture of Canada, in short, Nina falls into the dilemma of her traditional mindset of Indian middle-class society and her solitude, disappointment growing into the western culture. Nina, the central character of this novel, shifts to Halifax, Canada, after marrying Ananda, who is a dentist by profession. She has to resign her job of lecturer in Delhi which is in the true sense, her loss of individuality. Nina's educational qualification proves to be worthless in Canada which entraps her as unemployed. They even fail to produce a child which stands as a big reason for their broken relation. Though she is fond of reading books, she fails to escape from her feelings of alienation. Hence, she gets indulged into the dilemma of east and west. Ananda labels her as "the perfect mix of east and west."

Manju Kapur, too, writes that "Her devotion to her mother and her willingness to consider an arranged introduction proved her Indian values, while her tastes, reading, thoughts, manner of speech and lack of sexual inhibition all revealed western influences. Due to her experiences as an immigrant, Nina learns the fact that east and west have tremendous differences which can't be equal. This fact ruins her dreams about a foreign country as well as married life. This is an ordinary picture of an immigrant who can be seen as alienated due to the entrapment of outlandish people and surroundings as well as a new culture. Mahnaz Afkhami rightly points out: "Along with the loss of their culture and home comes the loss of the traditional, patriarchal structures that limited their lives in their own land. Exile in its disruptiveness resembles a rebirth for the woman. The pain of breaking out of a cultural cocoon brings with it the possibility of an expanded universe and a freer, more independent self." Manju Kapur takes writing as a protest. She thinks it is a way of mapping from the point of a woman's experience. Through her novels she talks weird problems will come out a socio-political development in India. This novel is real depositions of woman concern her personality cult in the individual personification of a vicious marriage she has expounded the male dictum of woman as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history and those in power trying to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes. As a modern writer Manju Kapur recorded the truth and nation's socio-political flux through her fictive narrative. She defines the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and perish in for at lump. In the novel *A Married Woman*, the author deals women's problems in the modern context. It is a seductive lover story of love passion. It is also deals political and political issues on the time.

'*A Married Woman*' deals Astha's physical relationship with Pipeelika. Astha, the protagonists of the novel peril the closing of the acquisitions of her traditional marriage and secure family. The author deals the disputed issued of homosexual relationship in challenging way. This is a normal one in modern societies through we may or may not accept it. But in India it is not a common and not acceptable one. But the author handles this theme very boldly. Astha's yearning for a scope in her life other than being a wife, mother and a daughter-in-law against a strongly sensed in context of Indian sectarian politics. It presents an interesting account of combination of problems, unsafe and unrest faced by middle class woman and nation both at the edge of transition. The novelist presents a lesbian relationship between Astha and Pipeelika but in the end traditional norms are set in play to restrict women's sexuality within the structure of hetero normativity, relationship that are confines, within marriage and often with opposite sex.

Manju Kapur is the significant writer in presenting the female characters. Kapur's novel deeply analyses the sufferings of women who undergone many family issues. Search for one's destiny is the central theme in all her novels. Her protagonists are educated which let them think in an innovative way to tackle all odds in their life. She has successfully portrayed the conflict of tradition and modernity through her female protagonist. One can see the emergence of new women in Kapur's heroines, who do not want to be a rubber puppet in the hands of men. As a feminist writer, Manju Kapur's novels deal with the strong protest of the male-dominated society. All her novel voices against the male domination towards women and also it presents the new Indian women voice against the male chauvinism. A New-woman in search of self-identity is her main theme and seeks liberation in all walks of life and it replaces the traditional image of Indian women. This novel revolves around the three generations of women such as Kasthuri, Virmati, and Ida. Ida is the protagonist of this novel who recollects her mother's past in the eyes of her uncle. Kapur portrays her women characters in the sense of tradition and modern outlook. Virmati is the protagonist of this novel represents as the former category, Sakunthala her cousin presents in the latter category. Kapur shows the drastic change between these two women characters.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) won her the most acclaimed Commonwealth Prize for the Best First Book. Manju Kapur shows women in search of their own space. *Difficult Daughters*, written in 1998, is set on the time period during the last years, which were leading to the socio-political catastrophe, the Partition of 1947. This novel is also set within the historical context exemplifying the struggles which women faced during in the early 20th century. Her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) is about what happens when old customs lose their power and the woman no longer believes that her life should be determined in a narrow fashion. *Home* (2006) is the next novel of Manju Kapur selected for the research study.

Manju Kapur has made significant contribution to Post-Independence Indian English fiction. Her fiction is not only a story which is to entertain the reader but also to educate. Each of her novel reflects the different types of women who struggle in cultural conflict, patriarchal domination, identity crisis, immigrant experience etc. One such novel is *Home*. It tells how the women suffer in patriarchal family. It narrates how the women break traditional boundaries and walk through the path of success in their life. The heroine Nisha in *Home* searches for cultural identity in the midst of her patriarchal family.

Home touches a rather complex area covering woman's emancipation and empowerment. *Home* explores the complex topography of the Indian family. Manju Kapur, in all her novels, highlights on how women in the Indian society are bereft of proper education in the name of tradition. Lack of education makes them dependable and vulnerable to both the inner world of the zenana and the outer world. Through her novels, Kapur raises the seminal issues of women in a very befitting manner. She also delineates the grim and pathetic reality of Indian women. She advocates the plausible reality that education brings dignity, honour and power. Hence, progress and development of a society depends on the emancipation and empowerment of both the sexes. *Home* is a masterful novel of the acts of kindness, compromise and secrecy that lie at the heart of every family. The novel *Home* deals with Nisha's challenges in cultural identity and her struggle against patriarch. It also exhibits the theme of Post-colonial Literature.

The novel *Home* also exposes many questions that are embedded within the family. There are questions like – the revolt against the ancient traditions, quest for identity, the problems of marriage; and, last but not least, a woman's struggle for her survival. The novel projects deep understanding of human nature. Kapur presents a touching account of the sexual confrontations thrust upon the delicate body of Nisha. Nisha's friendship with Vicky and then the seduction by Vicky with her creates the horror in her mind. Vicky victimizes Nisha and deprives of her mental composure and sleeps in the coming days. Nisha's dearth of maturity, inability and her physical fragility constricts her conflict with the perpetrator. Yet she firmly fights Vicky's attack and voices her aversion. When the victimizer wields brute force to make her succumb to his evil designs, she could no longer hold control over her body. A good example of the misuse of religion to downscale women is Sona's narration of *Vat Savitri Katha* to Nisha and the other women in the family. The opening chapter of the novel entitled 'Sisters' describes the two sisters - Mrs. Sona Lal and Mrs. Rupa Gupta. We are informed that both of them were childless. Of them one was rich and the other poor. Sona is the eldest daughter-in-law of a cloth-shop owner named Banwari Lal. Rupa is the wife of an educated but badly paid government servant named Ramesh. Both of them are irrespective of their social and familial backgrounds. Both of them had difficulties in their personal lives. Rupa is the younger sister. She had difficulties that are easily narrated.

Sona's difficulties were unheard agonies in a joint family. The traditional business of the Banwari Lal family is selling saris. When the business is increasingly sidelined by the new fashion for jeans and stitched salwar kameez, the Banwari Lal family must adapt. But instead of branching out, the sons remain apprenticed to the struggling

shop. The daughters are confined to the family home. The envy and suspicion grip parents and children alike. There is the need for escape - whether through illicit love or in the making of pickles or the search for education. This becomes ever stronger. There are two female characters Sona and Rupa. They are sisters. One is good looking and the other merely plain. Sona is the beautiful elder sister. She is married to the elder son of Banwari Lal while the younger one, Rupa's husband is just a junior Government officer. Sona is not able to conceive even after two years of her marriage. Her mother-in-law comments her occasionally: "What can you know of a mother's feelings? All you do is enjoying life, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you."

Sona performs every duty as a wife and daughter-in-law. She was trained from an early age. Meanwhile, Yashpal's younger brother, Pyarelal gets married to Sushila. She belongs to a well-to-do business family of Karol Bagh. Their marriage is appreciated by all the family because it is arranged by the parents. Sushila brings a huge dowry with her including a scooter, fridge, cooler, double bed and sofa. This is the typical Indian tradition, specially the Indian mentality to show the richness through the dowry from both sides – families of bride and bridegroom. As Yashpal the eldest of the two sons of Lala Banwari Lal of Delhi's Karol Bagh falls in love with Sona, there occurs much debate in the Banwari Lal household regarding the love marriage. After he falls in love with Sona, Yashpal spent the night in the thoughts of love. The next morning he gives the address of the girl's house to his father. She considers her as the girl on whom his happiness depended. He wants his father to go and talk to the family regarding the marriage without any delay. Even he threatens his father of leaving the shop and living rest of his life by the banks of Ganges if he could not marry the girl. Yashpal's parents did not take this idea kindly. They were traditional business people. They knew that it was necessary to arrange the marriages very carefully. Because it was one of the many ways to get financial security as well as insure the family harmony. Among the other prerequisites of the arranged marriage were dowry, family background and understanding of the value of togetherness. Thus, Manju Kapur highlights the social dichotomy of arranged marriage versus love marriage. Sona accepts her sister-in-law's orphan son, Vicky.

Finally, Sona gives birth to a baby girl. Everybody in the family is happy because "It is good to have a girl in the house".(35) Girl is considered as Lakshmi for the traditional family. In most of the Indian patriarchal families, birth of a girl is considered the arrival of the Lakshmi. "And now the womb has opened", expressed Rupa, "a baby brother will come soon." (36) Sona's delivery of her next progeny, a son is enjoyed and welcomed more than the first. Sona's mother-in-law declared, "Now I can die in peace". (41) Both of her sons now have their sons. They can hold their head high in the society. When Sona holds her son, she feels expiated as she had done her duty towards the family by giving birth to a much awaited son. Sona feels the disgrace gone, "with appearance of little Raju, dark and plain featured like his father, but a boy, a boy." (48)

Nisha the main female protagonist is in search of 'home'. Home is a place she could call her own, where she could take her own decisions. She can do things that she wanted to in her own way, a place where she could 'be'. But from the very start of the novel, she is uprooted from this haven that her father and grandfather created for her, in their own terms. She is not cared for her chastity in her home. She is sexually abused in this 'home' by her cousin Vicky. Being insecure and scared in her home, Nisha starts having nightmares. So she is sent to Sona's childless sister, Rupa and there to some extent, she felt at 'home'. Nisha is a confident, self-reliant female. She is a bold and determined person. She defies patriarchal notions. She is married to a widower, Arvind who takes her to her real home, "Now you are home," said Arvind as they climbed the stairs. Marriage becomes a displacement for Nisha. From this situation, she was at peace to a situation of resettlement. In ten months time, she accomplishes the purpose behind her marriage. She gives birth to twins. She loses her economic freedom as well as status in society as a decision maker. The visibility in acceptable societal roles as a wife, mother, sister, friend is complemented by the desired invisibility as lesbian lover. The women themselves have very little agency in making their voices heard.

Conclusion

Kapur questions the submissive and passive existence of women and their roles as subservient as well as obedient to the patriarchy. The attempt has been made how women like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in *A Married Woman* and Nisha in *Home* go against the stream of the traditional way life and accept the new way of life with new ideology. The other women related with these protagonists are also different kinds of women playing the multidimensional roles at their own places. There is a transition occurring in the life conditions of the Indian women through the women characters in the novels of Manju Kapur. This transition is transforming the Indian women from traditional women into modern women. The change occurs in the lives of Nisha, Virmati and Astha who represent Indian women fraternity in Manju Kapur's novels. The new image of women presented by novelists under study is ambitious, lustful, power hungry and bold. She is an assimilation of western influences as well as her native culture. She is a hybrid who despite of all kinds of upheavals, is able to strike a balance among diverse

spheres of her life.

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