

**A Study of the New Woman in the Selected Novels of
Manju Kapur and Shobha De**

**Dr. Ancy Joseph, M.A., Ph.D.
Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET.**



Shobha De

Courtesy: <http://www.famousauthors.org/shobhaa-de>

Abstract

From time immemorial, Indian society is patriarchal in its approach. It demands submissiveness, patience, obedience, unconditional love and service mentality from a woman. If anyone deviates from the traditional paradigms, they are hardly accepted in the society and even considered as an outcast. With the acquisition of education and occupation that led to economic independence, Indian women's approach towards their own servitude state begin to change. The present paper attempts to make an inquiry into the new woman concept employed by two leading female authors, Manju Kapur and Shobha De in their works.

Key words: Manju Kapur, Shobha De, identity, suppression, self-quest, new concept of woman

The New Woman Concept

This paper attempts to make an inquiry into the new woman concept employed by two leading female authors, Manju Kapur and Shobha De in their works. Literature is indeed the most explicit account of the human essence. It is a medium through which the spirit of our living is made predominant by linking it to the fanciful experience. From time immemorial; Indian society is patriarchal in its approach. It demands submissiveness, patience, obedience, unconditional love and service mentality from a woman. If anyone deviates from the traditional paradigms, they are hardly accepted in the society and even considered as an outcast. With the acquisition of education and occupation that led to economic independence, Indian women's approach towards their own servitude state begins to change. In the early period of twentieth century onwards, women started to react and oppose the phallo-centric suppressions and begin to think and decide upon the matters that affect them. It paves way to the daring and striking concept of the modern woman.



Manju Kapur

Courtesy: http://www.veethi.com/india-people/manju_kapur-profile-7757-25.htm

On Suppression Silence and Sacrifice- Manju Kapur and Shobha De

Most of the Indian female writers fix the suppression silence and sacrifice of Indian womanhood in their works. It tells about the silent sufferings, agony, frustration and helplessness of feminine life. Manju Kapur and Shobha De are two among the prominent female authors who stand for the rights of suppressed Indian women. Manju Kapur is a Delhi born writer who has bagged the commonwealth writer's prize for the Best book in Eurasia section for her maiden

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:12 December 2017

Dr. Ancy Joseph, M.A., Ph.D. and Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET.

A Study of the New Woman in the Selected Novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De

venture *Difficult Daughters* (1998). *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *the immigrant* (2008), *The Custody* (2011) and *Brother* (2016) are the contributions to the field of Indian fiction. Kapur evolves as a sensitive author who presents the struggle of the middle-class educated women against the predatory male-dominated society.

Shobha De, who hails from Maharashtra, is the author of twelve books. In 1988, she wrote her first novel-the best-selling *Socialite Evenings* (1989) followed by *Starry nights* (1990), *Sisters* (1992), *Sultry Days*(1994), *Strange Obsession* (1992), *Snapshots*(2006), *Second Thoughts* (1996), *Shooting From The Hip* (1994), *Small Betrayals* (1995), *Surviving Men* (1998) and *Selective Memory: Stories From My Life* (1998). As a female writer she reads the inner conflict of women especially from aristocratic higher society. Through her writings she tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance.

Focus on Selected Works

The data for the study is the selected works of the two renowned Indian female authors Manju Kapur and Shobha De. Manju Kapur's chosen works are *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home* and *the immigrant*. The selected works of Shobha De are *Socialite Evenings*, *Sultry Days*, *Sisters* and *Second Thought*. These fictions reflect the concept of modern woman bold enough to cross the patriarchal threshold. Focusing on the feminist theories and the major concepts of Indian feminism the study analyses the variations in the approaches of the two Indian female authors. This is an analysis of the search by a group of women for their own identity and space in their family and society.

The female authors, Shobha De and Manju Kapur deal the issue of gender marginalization. Their novels chronicle the sufferings and distress faced by the Indian female under the tight hold of patriarchy. The major aims, objection and scope of the present study are to explore the rigidity imposed upon women by the patriarchy, to analyze the physical, mental and emotional suppression faced by the Indian women folk, to examine the impact of education that led to economic independence upon the new generation women, to trace the suppressive norms and practices that prevails in Indian patriarchal society that hinders the growth of exuberant women, to identify the rigid measures taken by the modern women to protest against

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:12 December 2017

Dr. Ancy Joseph, M.A., Ph.D. and Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET.

A Study of the New Woman in the Selected Novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De

the age old practices that questions their own identity, to understand and assess the concept of modern women in India who fight against the gender inequality that prevailed in all the faces of society and family.

Protagonists

Shobha De and Kapur caricature Indian women's displacement and marginalization both in culture and society through her four novels. These novels very well expose the new hybrid culture that blends the western style, ideas and values with the Indian traditional pattern. It depicts the heroines who attain success to an extent in gaining freedom from social bondage forming a basis for feministic study.

. The protagonists of Manju Kapur long for their self-identity and liberty from the traditional mentality of the society. They attempt to break away from the traumatic experiences of the patriarchy and assert their identity through actions than words and no more ready to suffer at the hands of male chauvinists.

While Shobha De deals with the inner conflicts and hostilities of mainly aristocratic upper class women, Manju Kapur sorts with the feministic concerns of middle class educated women. Even though the protagonists of both authors deal with women of varied social background, they have more or less similar experiences of suppression from the side of male oriented society.

The extreme sensitivity and their constant reaction towards the hardship and distress of women and their powerful stands towards the feminist issues and their rights brought the two Indian women writers Manju Kapur and Shobha De together in this study. Though they stand for various similarities in dealing with the feministic ideological assumptions, they do differ from each other in various ways. Both the writers share a vision of a common future that is of an androgynous society where equalitarian and close relationship between men and women flourish and flower. They utilize the power of literature in the form of fiction to convey and upgrade woman's quest for self-identity, completeness and autonomy.

Values and Principles of Feminism

The novels of both Shobha De and Manju Kapur convey the ideological obligation of the authors to the values and principles of feminism. In their fiction, both writers manifest the working of phallo-centric doctrines that affect and control the body, mind, intellect and emotions of women making them 'fragile inside' so as to structure them in a way to support the sexist social structure of hierarchy that subjugates them always. With an intention to expose and oppose the androcentric power principles, both authors fabricate a narrative of defiance and a declaration of feminist consciousness through their fiction.

Portraits by Shobha De

With a resolution to expose the plurality and complexity of women's experience and to specify the feasible areas of improvement for women, Kapur and De have successfully caricatured wonderful portraits of the bare realities of femalehood in their works. Along with the presentation of the harsh realities of womanhood, they make attempt to bring relevant social changes to improve the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual burdens of women. Both the authors and their works stand for humanitarianism and unveil the infinite care and compassion for the suppressed folk.

Through her works, De projects light on to many contemporary issues related to Indian female folk. Her female characters dare to move away from the patriarchal regime mainly with the liberated thoughts achieved as a result of education that they are exposed to. Their thoughts, deeds and claims emphasise the fact that they are independent young new generation woman.

The feminine world presented by De in her novels, reflect the liberated individuals losing themselves from the bondages of nuptial knots and moves against the age old practices of patriarchal hegemony. They reject the promotion of phallo-centric values that considers the female factors as negative and almost nullified. De's feminine world is in its fullness because the character's humanness is linked with femininity. In her first novel *Socialite Evenings* De presents the emergence of the female protagonist Karuna as an empowered lady fulfilling her dreams in her life discarding the dominations of male society. She is depicted as a woman who asserts her feminine psyche through revolt and mitigation. She raises her voice against the stereotypes

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:12 December 2017

Dr. Ancy Joseph, M.A., Ph.D. and Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET.

A Study of the New Woman in the Selected Novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De

gender based culture. While Karuna leads a life of emotional frozenness due to her entrapment into a frail and unavailing martial relationship, she attempts her maximum to be an ideal wife. At the peak of her urge to fulfill her emotional thirst, Karuna asserts herself to find her own way of fulfillment. She moves away from the subjugating and enslaving traditional concept of married life and emerges herself as a woman who can be associated with the third phase of Elaine Showalter, The Female Phase.

In *Second Thoughts*, the author deploys the agony and anxiety of the newly married woman Maya and her inner struggles to attain some sort of meaning in her life. At its peak, while Maya's identity is completely lost and she is forced to live completely confining herself to her husband's needs, she boldly explores her life at Mumbai through her extramarital relationship with Nikhil. She transfigures herself through Showalter's first phase, The Feminine phase to the second phase, The Feminist phase.

De's *Sultry Days* unravels the baseless lives of many aristocratic public figures through the viewpoint of Nisha and Dev. She presents the divinely considered institution of marriage as a dispensable thing in life. Through her fictional works, De exemplifies the life of modern people who insignificantly places the institution of marriage.

All the women characters in the novel disregard the basic spiritual and moral concerns of womanhood and place themselves in the third phase, The Female phase. They all attempt to have a complete freedom and liberation in all walks of their life. They protest against the commodification of women, one among the attitude of phallogocentric pattern.

Through *Sisters*, De presents a modern new woman, Mikki with great valour and strength. At her young age, she boldly takes the responsibilities of a whole business and establishes her own life along with her co-sister Alisha, irrespective of the sufferings she was destined to face from the side of her cruel hypocritical husband Binny. She changes herself to become a strong powerful woman to face the realities of life. Through the portrayal of Mikki, the author very successfully throws light on the harsh realities of the patriarchal society. She also hints about the growing awareness among the women who wake from their ignorance and

inaction. Mikki's pitiable life with Binny strengthens her innate desire for freedom and transforms her to be fit in Showalter's Female phase.

Kapur and De

The ideological presumptions and justifications manifested in the fictional works of both Kapur and De are really worth reading because of illuminates our mind and provoke thoughts to the contemporary relevant issues in the society. Their ideological concerns demand over the gender free society where political, social and economic equality of the sexes comes true as reality. They believe that sexism is only a social practice that can be altered and revised at any time by people who are willing to modify their attitudes and habits. The mutinous feminist Kate Millet reflects, it must be clearly understood that the arena of sexual revolution is within human consciousness even more pre-eminently than it is within human institutions. So deeply embedded is patriarchy that the character structure it creates in both sexes is perhaps even more a habit of mind and a way of life than a political system (*Sexual Politics* 63).

In their proficient hands fiction has become a powerful medium and a strong strategy for women emancipation. Their successful presentation of the politics and the traits of feminism in as artistic manner led them to elicit the very positive and apt responses in the readers mind and prompts them to adapt and act according to the idea of androgynous society portrayed in the society. The Indian middle class women protagonists of Kapur are exposed to the two opposing and conflicting forces of the cultural constraints for women and the modern feministic ideologies of women's equality and autonomy.

Kapur's Portraits of Women

The modern women characters of the work *Difficult Daughters* do not accept the norms and notions of the traditional androcentric society that prevailed in India right from the centuries back. The work reflects all the sociological, psychological and political aspects of Indian society from the perspective of its approach towards women. With the impact of education, modernisation, liberalisation and globalisation, women folk realise their worth and begin to stand for it shattering the persisting custom and cultural practices. Though Virmati is presented as an emotionally starved being, she boldly rises against the stereotypical practices to fulfill her own

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:12 December 2017

Dr. Ancy Joseph, M.A., Ph.D. and Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET.

A Study of the New Woman in the Selected Novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De 56

urges. Thus the protagonist Virmati stands as an incipient new woman with her own awareness making herself a part and parcel of the second phase of Showalter, The Feminist phase.

A Married Woman traces the emergence of Astha as a social activist quenching her emotional thirst by getting involved in a lesbian relationship. As Astha passes through the social, cultural and mental conflict, she herself transcends into a talented woman, surer of herself and more confident. Astha becomes conscious of herself-fulfillment like a post-colonial woman and craves out a life for herself violating social codes that restrict her from asserting her own womanhood. Turning to lesbianism and denying social codes, she empowers herself along with Pipeelika. Both of them can be enlisted under the third phase, The Female phase.

The Immigrant is the fourth novel of Kapur in which she portrays the protagonists as female longing for their self-identity and liberty from the traditionalist mentality of the society. It depicts the female protagonist Nina's quest for her identity both as a female and as an immigrant. At that point of her life, Nina liberates herself from the stereotypical expectations of her gender and strengthens her mind to rectify the hollowness in her life by equipping herself financially with the support of a job. She transmutes herself to be apt for the third phase of Showalter, The Female phase.

The novel titled, *Home* caricatures the delineation of a female entrepreneur Nisha who hails from a traditional orthodox Indian family. Nisha boldly violates all the conservative notions towards love, marriage, education and occupation of women. She establishes her own boutique "Nisha Creations" and attempts to make her own trade and industrial sovereignty as a means of attaining her own identity. She traverses from the first Feminine phase to reach the second Feminist phase.

No Idealisation of Women

The novels of Kapur and De do not attempt to idealise womanhood but present the realistic and naturalistic traits of womanhood. They challenge the gender based discrimination and construct energetic and lifelike women characters in their works. Both Kapur and De introduce the psychic behaviour and social operation of women in their creative world.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:12 December 2017

Dr. Ancy Joseph, M.A., Ph.D. and Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET.

A Study of the New Woman in the Selected Novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De 57

Through the means of their fictional works, Kapur and De urge the readers to know about the female psychic experiences and promote their ideas of freedom, equality, tolerance and true love. They also elucidate the causes and impacts of the submissiveness of women to the gender based system.

Kapur and De through their fictions attempt to make changes in the age-old traditions and andro-centric conventions that hamper the free growth and development of women. Both writers attempt to bring metamorphosis in the common concept of women under patriarchal supremacy and promote the limitless opportunities for the development of women in their own social context.

Kapur and De interrogate the passivity of Indian women from both middle class society as well as from upper aristocratic society, by purposefully rejecting the victimisation, stereotypical and passive representation of women in their fictions. Their female protagonists are faced by different types of oppressions like social, physical and intellectual ill-treatment but they do not easily yielded to it. They are incessant fighters who employ verbal and non-verbal methods of protest.

Kapur's Virmati, Nisha, Astha and Nina along with De's Karuna, Maya and Mikki move against the rigid norms of androcentric society. Astha of *A Married Woman*, chooses to be a lesbian in the form of sweet revenge against her husband. In De's *Second Thought*, Maya dares to go along with Nikhil to fulfill her dream of knowing Mumbai city and even enjoys his companionship against her husband's rigid attitude.

The patriarchal concept on womanhood is the life led by a woman that is centred around their own husbands, children and family. Women are less exposed and have a very limited social contact. It formulates a group of women who are inefficient to think something apart from marriage and children as their greatest goal. That is why Maya's husband in *Second Thoughts* considers Maya as a completely satisfied housewife irrespective of her ardent desire to attain few of her basis needs.

It is often quoted that “A modern man is a walking civil war”. But in this post-modern era, it is much apt for the modern women who confer in choosing between the traditional concept of womanhood and the modern notion of new womanhood.

Kapur and De, as representatives of these women who encounter this sort of decision making conflict that goes through in their minds right from birth to death. It determines whether she is a conformist or non-conformist, conventionalists or modernist, feminist or antifeminist and winner or loser. The female characters of Kapur and De unanimously reject the inflexible patronising holds of patriarchy and favour the self-identity in their decision making strategy.

While De focuses on the inner conflicts and strife of the aristocratic upper class women, Kapur is concerned with the feministic ideologies that confront with the middle class educated women. Even though the protagonists of both these authors deal with women of varied social backgrounds, they have more or less similar experiences of suppression from the male centered society.

Man-Woman Relationship

The major theme of Kapur’s and De’s fictional works is the man-woman relationship. They portray their new woman characters as those who are not ready to yield to the conventional and hierarchal world of hetro-sexuality. On the one hand, these women disregard the domineering and superficial man-women relationships, and on the other, they demand intimacy and relationship purely based on equality, justice, mutual respect, affection and admiration between man. The new woman characters of De and Kapur enclose the feminist assumption of an ideal man-woman relationship. They urge men as well as women to take positive and creative approach to the concepts of evolving feminist waves that highlight the basis rights of women. They exhort men to have adaptability and flexibility to the paradigms of new womanhood and woman.

Thus, both the writers, Kapur and De, through their fictional characters try to fix the concept interrogated by Betty Freidan in her work *The Feminine Mystique*, “Who knows what

woman can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love . . .?" (331)

WORKS CITED

Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*, transl. and ed. H.M. Parshley. London: Penguin, 1974. Print.

De, Shobha. *Second Thoughts*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1996. Print.

...*Sisters*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992. Print.

...*Socialite Evenings*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1989. Print.

... *Sultry Days*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1994. Print.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Norton. Penguin Books, 1965. Print.

Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: India Ink, 2000. Print.

... *Difficult Daughters*. London. Faber and Faber, Ltd, 1998.

... *Home*. London: Random House, 2006.

... *The Immigrant*. London: Random House, 2010.

Dr. Ancy Joseph M.A., Ph.D.

HOD, Associate Professor

Department of English

St. Dominic's College

Kokkappally

Kanjirappally 686555

Kerala

India

ancyvg@gmail.com

Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Christ College

Irinjalakuda 680125

Kerala

India

anujins001@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:12 December 2017

Dr. Ancy Joseph, M.A., Ph.D. and Anusha Mathew, M.A., NET.

A Study of the New Woman in the Selected Novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De