

Manju Kapur and Feminist Issues in Her Novels

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Abstract

The various manifestations that have been portraying women by the Indian Women novelists have recently gained advanced attraction during the Post-Colonial period which has attained a remarkable and tremendous change by the great Indian women novelists notably Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, Manju Kapur, Githa Hariharan and so on. They have portrayed the women characters as individuals who fight against suppression and oppression of women by the patriarchal society. They portray women as rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the shackles of exploitation and oppression, awakening with search for identity, to assert their individuality. Manju Kapur is one of the prominent new voices making her presence felt. Her novels speak about women's frustration, refusals, retaliations, and their breach of conventional expectations. She raises the voice against male chauvinism to claim the rights of economic independence of women. The present paper explores the utmost excitement and anguish of some of the protagonists such as Virmati of *Difficult Daughters* in their quest for Self-Identity and Emancipation and protest against the blind dogmas of socio-cultural as well as patriarchal clutches guised as traditional customs.

Keywords: Manju Kapur, Feminist Issues

Introduction

The novels of Manju Kapur disclose that deviations in modernity have led to the hollowness in our society and the modern life. As one of the strongest Feminist Indian authors she has insisted on the up-lift of women empowerment and strength. She has written five great novels, namely *A Married Woman*, *Custody*, *Difficult Daughters*, *Home* and *The Immigrant*.

Besides these novels, Kapur has written short stories- The Necklace, The Birth of a Baby, The Power behind the Shame and Speaking up for Inter-Community or Cross Marriages.

In all her novels, the readers get to experience the woman of modern era, her problems and her desire to become independent. The husband-wife relationship has been taken up as a major theme in all her novels. She exposes the exploitative trends of the patriarchal society in which male plays the dominating role and portrays the woman who want changes in the norms of traditions. She has also contributed more than 50 articles. This paper presents the highlights of her notable novels to demonstrate the distinct trends of their representations.

Virmati, a strong character in the novel *Difficult Daughters* that has been portrayed to find space in the world of patriarchal supremacy, where female marginality and centrality of stereotypical definition of women are defined well. Through the doors of this beautiful novel Kapur weaves a tale that is set in the British India of forties about a woman Virmati, who defies the rigidity of her traditional household, dares to fall in love with a married man, enlightens her mind through studies and finally gets married to live as a co-wife of her beloved. The novels depict both the submissive and rebellious women and explore their bonding with their mother, siblings, friends and other relatives. It also explains the psyche of the urban, educated middle-class women who are trapped between tradition and modernity.

Virmati struggles hard to find a place of her own amidst the chaos in her family that finds expression in the political upheaval of those times gets inspired by a inspirable character Lahore and she discovers a possibility of freedom to have a chance to get redemption by overcoming her inhibitions by participating in the Indian freedom struggle to taste the modernity which allures her. Instead, she chooses to fight for her personal struggles – with her family, her morality, and her will to marry the man she loves. Although she is able to lead her life on her own terms, she is never able to find a total reconciliation within herself. As the novel narrates eventually Virmati finds another Virmati in her own daughter, Ida- who refuses to tread on the path defined by her and later becomes a *Difficult Daughter* for Virmati just like herself, where she inherited the quality of being the difficult daughter like her mother Kasturi.

The novel, *Home*, exposes the still prevalent narrow-minded attitude towards the upbringing of a girl child in India. Kapur traces the painful journey of the protagonist, Nisha, from childhood into adulthood in search of self-identity. The analysis reveals Nisha's search for a home i.e. search for a place of shelter and security. Home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional security, nonetheless, it sometimes does not provide them any physical security to a woman in India. The novel describes the story of an ordinary middle class joint family, settled in Delhi. The physical abuse of children, in the hands of their own relatives, is also discussed through Nisha's sexual abuse by her own cousin, Vicky.

A girl is considered as an object of sexual arousal, thus it is expected that she should take care of her physical appearance, to be able to grab the attention of people as a perfect marriageable girl. Nisha's mother, Sona, always shoves her to be neat and well-dressed like a princess. She does not allow her to play in parks with other children because her complexion may become dark. The displacement that protagonists suffer and the suffocation that they face in the traditional limits of marriage and family is clearly brought out by the novelist.

The novel *A Married Woman* brings out the frustrations and adjustment of modern marriages. Marriage is defined as a legal and social certified union between two persons, which is legalized by the culture and traditions that recommend the rights to the partners. It refers to the rules and regulations which define the rights and duties after marriage. She beautifully insists on the fact that marriage implies the equal partnership and intimate union between a male and a female which is a strong association that connects not only two individuals, but also builds up a relationship between the two families. It brings stability and essence to human relations, which is incomplete without marriage. Its strongest function is concerned with the care of children, their upbringing and education. The concept of marriage varies from culture to culture, but its meaning is the same that is the union of two individuals of the opposite sex. This bond is supposed to be lifelong and special. The traditional concept of a husband and wife's status and role is slowly changing in contemporary Indian society; the tradition-oriented concepts of male dominance still largely conquer.

Custody, Manju Kapur's fifth novel, exposes the life of Metropolitan cities where people have become the victims of modernity. It is inspired by globalization and economic liberalization. With the initial surge of foreign investment which stormed in India, it was a period of economic and financial boom. The deluge was welcomed by investment bankers, bureaucrats, industrialists whether big or small, along with Government officials. The protagonists quite naturally have materialistic pursuits. The novel is about the stressed life between Raman, a developing marketing executive, his wife Shagun and Ishita. The present research is an effort to focus on a number of key aspects of the novel *Custody*, like- marriage versus freedom, polygamy, extramarital affairs, infertility, infidelity, manipulation of children in the hands of their divorced parents and the indifference of Indian judicial system. There is the ultimate picture of exploitation, manipulation, victimization and suffering. Each character has a unique mind-set, reflecting the modern virtues that have been adapted. The author manages to create a sublime atmosphere that exposes the various disasters that a family goes through and is beautifully portrayed in the novel.

Conclusion

Manju Kapur registers her concern for the Indian woman and deals with various feministic issues like female education, their empowerment, financial independence, eradication

of child marriages, the abolition of the dowry system, elimination of a woman's sexual abuse, etc. Kapur who herself was an English lecturer at Miranda House Delhi, has taken up cudgels to fight for woman's cause. She narrates important issues of class and nationhood and connects them to the emerging sense of female identity in postcolonial India.

The novelist is quite down to earth in her feminist approach to the woman's problems. All her protagonists protest against the social rules to become self-dependent, but finally compromise for the sake of social harmony. She is aware of the seriousness of the Indian woman's dilemma and her generation old struggles behind it, but she believes that a positive change in her social status can materialize by bringing about a change in her mind-set and making her literate and well-informed. Kapur truly considers her role as Indian feminist as humanist-feminist.

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