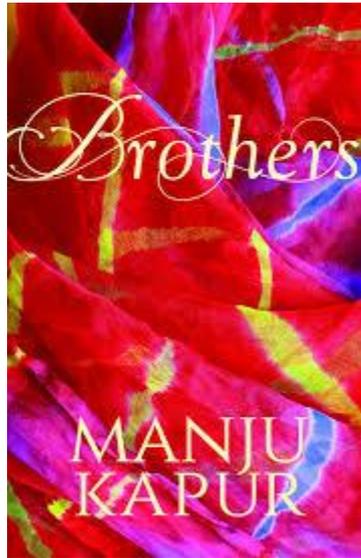


Marital Discord in Manju Kapur's *Brothers*

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Abstract

The post-colonial writer Manju Kapur records women's experiences in her works and in her hands, writing becomes a tool of liberation. As a writer, she strives for freedom within the world of patriarchal society through her writings. Kapur's protagonists find themselves trapped in marriage, some walking out and some find themselves unable to. In her sixth novel *Brothers*, she presents the traumatic situation of the protagonist Tapti who undergoes suffering because of the insecure, inferior nature of her husband Mangal Singh Gaina. The supportive and encouraging nature of the brother-in-law, Himmat Singh leads to the doom of the characters. Kapur tries to break down the existing patriarchal society to create a space for her protagonists in the world of male chauvinism. Her writings offer new insights in the lives of women and it helps them see the ways in which patriarchy has limited them and her special focus is on women's personal experiences.

Keywords: Manju Kapur, *Brothers*, Patriarchal society, liberation, male chauvinism, companionship, destiny, divine institution, marriage, inferiority complex, insecurity and togetherness.

Manju Kapur is praiseworthy for her indomitable presentation of the miseries of modern Indian women. The inner turmoil of the suppressed women is faithfully exposed by the author. The displaced status of the female protagonists in the existing society is given a down-to-earth presentation by Kapur. In all her novels, she has delineated at length the suffering of Indian women within the institution of marriage. It is interesting to note that all types of subjugation and oppression of women find description in the pages of Kapur. As a writer of high profile, she chooses women from the Indian middle-class society as protagonist of her novels and through their experiences highlights the sordid realities of the sufferings of Indian women.

Marital disharmony is a dominant as well as often repeated theme in the works of Kapur. The personal, cultural and economic barriers of married couple often intensifies marital discord. Nowadays, marital discord has become common where the husband and wife look at the conflict as a threat to their requirements, interests, ideas, values and beliefs. Marital discord is seen as a discrepancy and difference in the married couple's ideologies. Certain feelings like alienation, loneliness, emotional incompatibility, financial worries, subjugation, pain and lack of space are some other issues discussed by Kapur in her writings.

Marriage is a unique and basic element in every society which is considered as a recognized entity. The purpose of marriage is not just to maintain or set up household affairs but more than that. It binds families, brings people into a special relationship and is recognized as a divine institution. Proper communication, sharing, love and understanding are the essentials of a successful married life. Companionship is also required without which the relationship remains an unfulfilled unit. Simone de Beauvoir opines, "The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. . . it is becoming a union freely entered into by two autonomous individuals; the commitments of the two parties are personal and reciprocal" (451). Marriage is an essential element in everyone's life. It is a unison of two different people from two different backgrounds, in it the love and commitment that these two people have for each other ought to be personalised and reciprocated.

The institution of marriage is based on the androcentric patriarchal structure. In the words of Nelly Furmaan, "Marriage produces a single social unit . . . whether one views marriage as the blissful coming together of equal voices speaking in unison, or as the site of the ongoing dialogue between individuals continuously affirming their differences, we cannot escape the structure it imposes, the patriarchal society it sustains" (76). Marriage is a collective unit where individuals can have either bliss or sorrow. Whatever it be, marriage operates on the principles of patriarchy from which one cannot escape.

Togetherness keeps the marital relationship intact. The novel *Brothers* begins with the protagonist Tapti's husband Mangal Singh Gaina in jail. It seems that they rarely spend time together and have anything in common between them. The solitary state of the protagonist is

put forth thus, “She was used to sleeping alone. If you collected all the nights of her married life that her husband had been away, it would amount to years and years. This state would be permanent now” (3). Tapti and Mangal Singh Gaina are not at good terms with each other. And the husband is now imprisoned which will aggravate their solitary status furthermore. Mangal Singh Gaina is in jail, as he killed his brother Himmat Singh Gaina, who is a politician. It is out of jealousy and also for the latter’s illicit relationship with his wife, Mangal Singh Gaina shoots him dead. Tapti’s mother blames the fate of her daughter for marrying the short-tempered villager.

Inferiority complex or insecurity leads to marital disharmony. Himmat Singh Gaina, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, visits the college, where Tapti, the protagonist studies. As a chief guest, he goes there and identifies Tapti’s potential. He chooses her for his brother Mangal Singh Gaina. Their married life runs smooth in the initial stages, later it disintegrates because of Mangal Singh Gaina’s insecure and inferior temperament. He is ambitious and also because of his indulgence in wrong business deals, he faces severe loss in his cement factory. Tapti tells Himmat Singh Gaina that, “The sale of the factory had devastated her husband” (285). The cement factory seems to be her husband’s dream which has now gone out of his hand. Besides, Tapti clears her IAS exams and becomes an efficient IAS officer, which turns Mangal Singh Gaina even more jealous of Tapti.

Extra marital affair in the novel brings about a doom of the characters. Himmat Singh Gaina speaks to Tapti about his brother’s ambition to become a big man. Tapti responds saying, “I too want to do something significant. Why should I sit around doing nothing, just because I am a woman?” (31). Like the other girls of her place, she hates to sit idle at home. Mangal Singh Gaina and Tapti get married. They are blessed by Virpal, the family patriarch, and his wife Mithari. Kapur says, “They bless them with sons and a long-married life” (35). Often in married life, the repressed and burdened feeling of women leads to infidelity and Tapti is an apt example for that. Already, Mangal suffers lack of confidence and lowliness. When he comes to know of his wife’s relationship with Himmat Singh Gaina, his own brother, Mangal Singh Gaina kills him and surrenders before the police. Himmat Singh Gaina is shot dead, when he is seen listening to the grievances of the people of his region. The incident happens as such:

The pistol’s snout glints as it is uncovered. Their eyes meet. Mangal raises the gun and empties three beauties into the older man. The chief minister falls, blood oozing from his chest. For a moment he stares at Mangal. . . . More security men surround Mangal, his arms are pinned behind him, his weapon snatched. There is no need for this, Mangal has made no move to leave the spot. His gaze is fixed on the slowly spreading red stain on the front of the white kurta. Not many present know that a brother has shot a brother, all that will come later. (376)

A brother's jealousy kills another brother. Mangal Singh Gaina finds it difficult to tolerate the success of his wife Tapti. Besides, his deficiency of love and concern towards his wife leads her towards his brother Himmat Singh Gaina, the opportunist. Lack of love in married life leads Tapti towards infidelity and lack of Tapti's fidelity drives Mangal, the husband kills his own brother.

On the other hand, Himmat Singh Gaina, gets his first wife divorced to marry Sonal, the daughter of his political mentor, Bishnoi Sahib, so that he can achieve his political goal. In the words of Darkhasha Azhar, "Marriage . . . is considered a pious ritual which not only incorporates in its fold two families but also closely binds two souls, diversified in views and tastes. . ." (37). It is only in marriage two souls which belong to two different families unite, inspite of their difference in ideas and viewpoints. Himmat Singh Gaina sends his brother Mangal Singh Gaina to get his wife's thumb impression in the divorce papers which is very poignant. She says, ". . . if she had annoyed him in some way, she was sorry, she begged forgiveness. She would learn city ways, she would change her style of dressing; all she wanted was a chance" (251). The nameless first wife of Himmat Singh Gaina begs for a chance to her brother-in-law to be united with her husband. Whatever happens, it is the women folk who suffer ultimately.

Kapur, as a writer of high profile, chooses women from the Indian middle class society as protagonist of her novels and through their experiences highlights the sordid realities of the sufferings of Indian women. Kapur delves deep into the inner recesses of the oppressed women and highlight their alienation and loneliness which seem to be the product of women's mental and emotional inequity. She is bothered about familial relationships especially between couples. Her novels are the proposal of feminine predicament. The varied elements which intensify the predicament of the female protagonist are frustration and storm which rage inside her inner self. Love and marriage ought to be complimentary to each other or else the marital relationship will land up in chaos. A reading of the novel of Kapur confirms the fact that the women are voiceless victims who can neither fight for their rights nor break the manacles. They are destined to suffer under the cruel norms of patriarchy. Even if they find that their husbands are not fair, they are voiceless to mend them. Kapur's writings offers new insights in the lives of women and it helps them see the ways in which patriarchy has limited them and her special focus is on women's personal experiences. Voicelessness of women and their subjugation are the outcome of patriarchal dominance. Men should think of the hardships encountered by women. Ultimately, women, in the novel of Kapur, whether, they win or lose their stand in married life, go ahead in the corridors of bleak existence.

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