

Fragmented Lives of Women in the Novels of Manju Kapur

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ABSTRACT:

This paper is an attempt to analyse Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* which intuitively unfolds the struggles of Indian women who are living in the patriarchal society. A Married Woman (2003), Home (2006), and The Immigrant (2009), are the other novels which earned her the Commonwealth Prize in the Eurasia Section. They were written with the intention of contrasting tradition to the modernity. It illustrates the problem of modern society and its value system. Manju Kapur is really eager to highlight the issues and topics that are pertaining to women from a wider angle. The issues of women have been addressed mostly through the new educated middle-classwomen. Her works evidently represents the notion that all women intended to be married and submit their lives to their husbands but they are able to attain some sort of fulfilment outside their home. In spite of that Women are motivated to enter into the world of family life. The mixing of traditional and modern mentality is the main cause for their struggles. The issue can be found in Manju Kapur's works as a unique identity. The novel *Custody* was an effort to adopt a feminist viewpoint in order to analyse the female body. The development of feminism in the 1960s, a new type of woman called the 'New Woman' arose who was entirely distinct from her conventional counterpart. This new woman may be aware, self-assured, and assertive, yet occasionally she may be deceived or emotionally duped. She eliminates her place as the other and gains the focal Centre.

Keywords: Male Chauvinism, Marriage, Male Identity-Perspective, Post-modernism, Society.

Introduction

The portrayal of her autonomous women by Manju Kapur wants to show a significant change in their situation. Women do not wish to rely on their dads, husbands, kids, or other male relatives to ensure their existence. In opposition, it is true; kids need courage to deal with life's ups and downs. They have a highly aggressive personality, are physically robust. They fit under the category of the New Woman who handles her problems independently. Manju Kapur is regarded as one of the biggest pioneers in the representation of the New Indian Woman in her novels due to the realistic portrayal of women in her works. She has launched a struggle and aware of her rights. Since it involves a battle against human vices like ego, greed, ambition, and selfishness, and it is not a simple or long-lasting struggle. Women have accepted this view of themselves as a man's privilege and have not resisted it. But the contemporary woman rebels against the unfairness of such an attitude and has led to new ways of thinking.

Manju Kapur talks on the idea of independence, which is sought after and attained by a nation, just as freedom is desired by a woman. She frequently states that she is curious about the lives of women. The female protagonist, Virmati, experiences several disappointments while trying to advance her education and uphold her traditional beliefs in the novel *Difficult Daughters*, which is mainly based on Manju Kapur's life. She has discovered interpersonal relationships that would let her



be herself while being the daughter of an orthodox mother and a progressive father. In this setting, as noted by Toni Morrison:

“Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is. To be a man is to be a man. What happens on the outskirts? How does it feel to have it? There is no such thing as a home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you know well. What it is to be at the edge of towns that bear your Company”. (Morrison 201)

The story depicts a culture where dignity is valued more highly than sadness and the joy of family members. This novel is set against the backdrop of partition in the towns of Amritsar and Lahore. The three phases of Indian independence are represented by women characters of the three generations Kasturi and Ida. Kasturi was depicted in a pre-independence situation, and she fell prey to the patriarchy's aggressive domination. She is the model of a mother who puts up with pain and sorrow. The life cycle of a lady who was committed from the start of her life has been disclosed through the character Kasturi. She was forced to perform household chores as a youngster, and after getting married, having a child, and becoming a mother, she devoted her entire life to her family.

Virmati has a contemporary view that has contributed to her aggression. She is really inspired by Shakuntala, so she chooses to pursue her study in Lahore. When her parents did not support her but she tried to end her life and thought that this was the solution to her problems. The letters of Virmati and Professor Harish are reflecting it as an epistolary novel. The professor wants both his wife and Virmati's attention but not loyal to them. Ingeniously, the professor decides not to abandon both his loyal wife and lover Virmati. Here, the professor's behavior is criticized. Manju Kapur is a well-known author with a strong Feminist ideology. Her books highlight the sociocultural plight of Indian women, who are trapped in a patriarchal, and male dominated culture. Her female heroes are middle-class wives who are well-equipped, educated, and who also deal with personal challenges. They seek equality from males as well as their own self. Her works blatantly depict their anguish and oppression inside the marriage and familial constraints. Manju Kapur says,

I am interested in women's lives, whether in politics or otherwise. Arenas or in private homes One of the main All of my books are preoccupied with how women manage to live. Negotiate both the inner and outer spaces in their lives. Sacrifices do they have to make in order to keep their home. Burning and at what cost to their personal lives do they find. Outside of the home, some kind of fulfillment. (Kapur 145)

The character Astha in the novel *A Married Woman*, lacks her husband Hemant's attention. But he consistently arrives late from office, venting about his employer and voicing his displeasure with everything. He never makes an effort to understand Astha's inner self, her thoughts. Due to this reason, she planned to pursue a teaching career. Her employment caused a gradual alteration in her life. It offered a chance to interact with the outside world. She involves herself with the outside activities and learns about all the restrictions and constraints. Hemant was not aware that she had a strong desire for sex and a physical relationship. Her in-laws admired for her strength. She has two children in the interim. Hemant focused on his business while refusing to assist her with raising their kids. In this sense, he must make four international trips each year. Astha must manage her issues like bringing up the children, a career, and manage the house on her own.

Hence, Hemant quits his job and launches his own company, which increased his workload and moved away from her. In this regard, Astha creates poetry to communicate her distress and isolated herself, but Hemant considered the poems to be nothing more than a waste of time. Astha is greatly impacted by it, giving up poetry in favour of painting, although she is often distracted: “There were too many interruptions, the servants, the children, the phone, the kitchen, her own restless mind” (Kapur 155). She needs her own room, which is being withheld by her. When Astha's mother gives all of her money to Hemant for business. Now, she felt even more alienated and subordinated.

The next novel, *Home* depicts the family of Banwari Lal, his two sons, Yashpal and Pyarelal, and their wives and kids. Kapur investigates the world of joint families. Banwari Lal's family is upper middle-class trades people with aspirations for upward mobility. Sunita, Banwari Lal's daughter, she was killed by her husband. Then her son Vicky was brought up by Banwari Lal. Home has been divisive and much scrutinized. Sona was childless for the first 10 years of her marriage, she is currently mired in a maze of family strife. For a lady who does not have children after her marriage, infertility was a catastrophe. Nobody holds that the male is responsible for the female's infertility, but only woman should take responsibility. In this tale, Sona goes on a risky adventure through this



branch of neurology. The transition from the maternal to the marital home is challenging for her because she must follow not only the patriarchal household's norms and regulations but also, she must be aware of the poor financial background in the family that is particularly sensitive to economic issues.

Both of the sisters are initially vulnerable due to their barrenness. Sona, on the other hand, soon achieved her lifelong dream of having a child. Rupa is still sterile. But it also shows Nisha, Sona's daughter, growing up and becoming her own person. The novel describes Nisha's life, hardships, and triumphs. Vicky, her own cousin, took advantage of her when she was a little girl. During her BA final, a man from a lower caste named Suresh falls in love with her. He adores her a lot.

The lovers managed a hasty meeting. Suresh was told he would have to declare himself. Nisha cannot handle the Situation at home; she wants everything out in the open. He will present him in the shop, man to man. (Kapur 195-196)

Although the youngster is willing to embrace her despite the fact that she is a 'manglik', the family rejects her for acting on her instincts. Nisha is from a prominent family and is quite attractive. Nisha was the first lady from the Banwari Lai family to be marketed for marriage. Her parents wanted to marry off their daughter into a household where she could live well for the rest of her life. Here, it is more obvious that her family is aware of the importance of caste, community, and shared values.

The 'mangalik' horoscopes that Nisha received caused her marriage to be postponed. Nisha launched her own fashion designing company, but Sona is not happy with this new turn in her life. She believes that a woman's 'honor' is found in Home. She declares, "She is going to get married. Why waste time and money on all this. A business was not like teaching; it was resignable when the bridegroom arrived" (Kapur 290). Nisha was unable to pardon her mother for what she had said. In contrast to the disparity, her father, Pyarelal, offers her some advice and business-related resources for her new venture. Nisha's terrible misfortune is the sole reason that she is allowed to launch her business. Marriages are arranged with little thought given to the potential spouses in order to boost the riches and status of the family.

The outside world is only for men who want to diversify their business. When Nisha was taken to Rupa's house to remain home and she was not permitted to cross the threshold, the outdated custom was broken. Nisha makes her first trip back to her house in eleven years. She has some independence at her college, but she must pay the price because her love for Suresh, a member of a lower caste, is doomed. She appears to be in a prison since all of her movements are directed outside, and everything she does was carefully observed. She married Arvind, and her future seems brighter. For Nisha, the marriage was a necessity rather than an act of love or personal goal.

The Role of Patriarchy

A thoroughly created, fragrant, and sophisticated universe has been portrayed by Manju Kapur, which is unusual for a first book *Difficult Daughters*. Virmati denies having a romantic connection. However, she is plagued by a strong sense of guilt. She also thinks that planned weddings are acceptable in society and it may be used to make a message. She is well aware that if she weds the professor, she may be viewed as the professor's second wife. She may, however, be a victim of her own circumstances. It is the family where Virmati was raised in and that taught her a lesson about gender prejudice. Girls are allowed to attend school in Virmati's household, but they must request it. For girls, education is not as required as it is for boys. And Virmati's mother assigns her to home chores. She risks punishment or being made a slave if she refuses to perform any of Kasturi's prescribed tasks. Despite the fact that Kasturi and Virmati are both members of the same family, Kasturi feels that females should be treated the same way as she has treated. In addition to thinking, Virmati was attempting to define who she was. For her, marriage represents freedom from the dread of social rejection, an option that may bring her back into the fold and prevent her from feeling insecure and uncertain. The Kasturi's generation did not see a need to revolt. They accepted the reality of their lives. Like Kasturi, Ganga considers marriage to be a fundamentally necessary in social and religious institution. She simply has domestic sensibilities. She is contented in raising the professor's children and sharing a home with him.



Through her book *A Married Woman*, Kapur has thought about writing as a form of protest against the way that women's experiences are measured. She discussed several topics which was relevant to the nation at present. The tale depicts a woman's genuine admission of her own nature. Even if women are not interested in history, she has talked about how Indian males view women as holy cows. It is about the modern period struggles with gender difficulties. The narrative examines love, desire, and devotion in an open-minded yet alluring way. In a difficult fashion, which are outlawed by the Indian Constitution but are still increasingly prevalent in the contemporary society, whether or not they accept it. She is not satisfied, so she seeks a relationship that Indian society forbids. When faced with difficulties in life, her anxieties, discomfort, loneliness, and isolation never urge her to embrace her sadness over her damaged relationship. Instead, they motivate her to feel guilty, passive, and low self-esteem. The fact that Astha is the family's centre of gravity is known by her husband, kids, and in-laws, but no one ever expressed it. She anticipates her spouse will also have some sentiments. She constantly makes adjustments to meet everyone's wants and feels trapped by her family's expanding needs. Astha is aware of it and concurs with the notion that a married woman's role in the household is that of an unpaid servant.

The idea results in divorce, the breakdown of a developing family, or an unwelcome act by a woman that kills her Indian standing socially and economically in the majority of Indian families. As stated by Simone de Beauvoir, she concurs with this attitude of women. She believes that married women are objects of marriage for reasons other than sex, such as interest, togetherness, and respect, in accordance with how men view women. A lesbian relationship is portrayed by Manju Kapur as a result of a married woman's disregard of her own family. It might be an effort to provide some aesthetic and emotional coherence. In comparison to a relationship with a man, a lesbian relationship does not pose the same threat to a marriage. In order to raise society's awareness of women's needs and give them a platform for self-expression, Kapur has presented women and the challenges they face on a personal, religious, and sociocultural level, as well as the changing image of women, moving away from the traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women and towards self-assured and ambitious women.

In Manju Kapur's *Home*, the components of household joy, ambitions, and desires are depicted. It is particularly remarkable in how it addresses the suffocating proximity and limiting characteristics of Indian joint family values. The big, joyful make-believe families shown in films are not representative of the world of joint families. The truth is far different from the movies. This world is struggling to deal with the intricacies and differences between people's personalities within the four walls of their own homes, to deal with generational difficulties, and to prevent children from growing up in cramped, private, or even professional places. Apart from that, the story concentrates on conflicts and rivalries. The female characters all reside in the same family but have distinct issues that are unrelated to one another. Here, this united family experiences both joy and sorrow. The issue with Sona and Pyare Lal's marriage is discussed at the beginning of the novel, followed by Sona's infertility throughout their ten-years of married life, her daughter's relationship with a boy from a lower caste, and ultimately her 'manglik' horoscopes. By offering compensation through her spouse, Rupa is justifying her infertility. Additionally, the main character, Nisha, is coping with serious problems for someone of her age. Each female role model protects herself by helping the others.

Astha has feelings of unfinishedness, repression, and agony, which are made worse by her engagement in the outside world of uprising and protest throughout *A Married Woman*. The parents of Astha want her to be aware of the prerequisites for marriage. But she studies in order to be free. She marries Hemant, but she is drawn to Aijaz because she is uninterested in the monotonous existence of a married woman in Hindu and Indian society. Her individuality and desire for independence pulled her away from her family's obligations. The lesbian connection between Astha and Pipee is another component of human relationships and adds yet another facet of rebel feminism. Astha approves of these partnerships because these justifications grow more compelling the more skeptical a woman is of men. In their lesbian partnership, Astha is the junior partner and Pipee is the senior partner.

However, everything disintegrates and turns around in the climactic portion when Pipee leaves for the US to pursue a PhD and Astha returns to the family having come to terms with reality. Tradition against modernity, permanence versus commonality, morality versus amorality, regular behaviour versus unique sex, fact versus fantasy, and religion versus humanism are all contrasted in *A Married Woman*. The story explores life's contradictions, paradoxes, illusions, and delusions. Astha



views marriage as a bond that encompasses all facets of life-physical, spiritual, social, and otherwise. Hemant views marriage as solely a sexual connection in which he merely fulfils his wife's demands, but she feels that a marital life requires participation in all chores and sharing all concerns with her spouse. Although Astha can be considered a new woman, she still possesses some frightened feelings that emphasise her return to the family and Indian traditions.

She felt like a straw woman when she was with Hemant. Her inner life was dead, with a man who noticed nothing, because it was calming to be with them for that very reason. Her When they made love, it was Pipee's face on his body. Astha I saw her hands, and she felt it as well. She accepted the misery of this dislocation as her reason for being a faithless wife. (Kapur, 287)

She does all because she wants to free herself from the burdens of life but motherhood first. The whole novel is briefly described by Anuradha Verma - Within the bounds of marriage, she discovers a latent Sexuality, which is driven by love and passion for her husband. She leads a seemingly blissful life, finding her feet in the painting is a requirement for the teaching profession, as is having two children. Yet somehow, underneath all this, lies a life of repression and Anguish (Verma, 52)

In Kapur's book *The Immigrant*, Nina is trying to make a home for herself but she is finding it difficult to live peacefully with her mother because of her marital problems. She also has a problem with her marriage since she doesn't want to give up on her long-term profession. She only marries as a consequence of compromise and pressure from Indian society. She suggests finding employment in Canada, but Ananda her husband alerts that it is difficult to succeed in a foreign nation. She tries to get pregnant but became unsuccessful, and after repeated efforts and medical counselling, she decides to become independent. Throughout the book, she is on a quest for genuine love, independence, and self-realization, but the search never ends. In her early years, she needs maternal love, male love during her adultery, and societal love from her family. She struggles endlessly to achieve her goals, but in the process of finding her voice, she loses a big portion of herself and comes to understand the meaninglessness of everything.

Conclusion

Thus Manju Kapur, like Githa Hariharan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Mridula Garg, etc., is one of the most prominent Indian women writers in English. The fascination of Indian writing in English lies in the phenomenon of literary creativity in a language other than the surrounding mother tongue, utters a very significant and old critic of Indian writing in English about the use of the English language. Manju Kapur contributed to English literature in her own unique way. The author all made an effort to depict modern women who had resisted the constraints of tradition, culture, patriarchy, and societal mores, and did it successfully. Her goal is to be freed from the oppressive taboos and practises that the male-dominated society has placed on women.

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