

Women Identity in the Select Novels of Manju Kapur

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with women identity in the novels of Manju Kapur. Manju Kapur is distinguished author of the contemporary age in India who has written five novels. I have taken two novels of her namely 'Difficult Daughters' (1998) and 'A Married Woman' (2003) in this paper. She presents the real condition of women in the society. She uses the treatment of the language perfectly. In her novels she talks about the reality of society, women identity, generation gap, woman education and all real conditions faced by common man. She gives importance to education without gender differences in her novels. Thus even after Indian Independence of 65 years, the condition of women education and social life have barely changed. Through her novels she exposes the condition of women's condition since Independence till the present age.

1. Introduction

There emerged a group of Indian Women Novelists like Kamala Markandya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri etc. who have handled the intimate life of women in a new light with extraordinary boldness and frankness; Manju Kapur is again a distinguished figure in the world of novels. Manju Kapur, who through the medium of her novels have tried to grapple with different manifestations of male domination against women, her writings carry out significant new meanings in the changed exemplar of cultural encounters in which conjugal roles, dual-burdens, equal opportunities and social constraints are seen from the feminist point of view. Manju Kapur has a worldwide popularity.

2. Manju Kapur

Manju Kapur is prestigious novelist of Indian English writers. She has written five novels named *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008) and *Custody* (2011). She was born at Amritsar in Punjab on 25 October, 1948. She married with Gun Nidhi Dalmia. At present she lives in Delhi and teaches in Delhi University. Her novel first novel "Difficult Daughters" won The Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1999 for the best first book. It is also best seller in India. Her fourth novel "The Immigrant" was awarded DSC Prize of South Asian Literature in 2011. Her novels depict gender difference, female freedom, her condition in society and importance of women education in Indian society from pre-independence to present era. Women in the novels of Manju Kapur are very flexible with family and society. They struggle between tradition and modernity. Gupta asserts that, "It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they plunge into a dedicate effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women with faultless backgrounds."

'Difficult daughter'(1998) is the story about a woman named Viramati who is simple and educated woman caught in between the sentimental situations of her family and also her longing for education, affection, freedom and domesticity.

Viramati is the central figure of the novel. She struggles for career and identity .Her mother name is Kasturi. She forces her to accept the marriage as a traditional norm. Viramati's life from beginning to end is full of sufferings. She is searching for self and her own identity. There is conflict between her mind and heart. Finally she loses all her hope. She doesn't want to be like her mother. Manju kapur has explored and traced the journey of many young female in this novel. Women in the novels of Manju Kapur are truly reflect the complexity of female psyche. This novel reveals the idea of women's emancipation. It has an autobiographical tinge and touch. Sumita Pal has rightly focused on the autobiographical elements in the novel:

Like Viramati, Manju Kapur was born in Amritsar and teaches in college. Her family was victim of partition and was Arya-Samajis like Viramati's family. Manju Kapur's father too was a professor, like Viramati's husband. Manju Kapur admits that she herself had been a difficult daughter for the mother whose priority was marriage and she, in turn wants her daughters to have good jobs. (Pal 137)

The narrator Ida in *Difficult Daughters* goes to Amritsar to clarify the name of her mother and she has taken the root from her relatives. She discovers many truths related her mother's life and the sufferings that have been tolerated during her whole life. She becomes a more typical daughter of a difficult daughter- Viramati. Manju Kapur's novels take shape in family background. Viramati has to bear the responsibilities to be a small mother of younger brothers and sisters. She feels to meet the need of making an existence of her own after meeting Shakuntala and she tries to break the tradition of an orthodox family. However, she becomes a pendulum between education and marriage. She protests and writes to Harish, a professor to whom she loves the Manju Kapur has depicted the characters as the breakers of the tradition of silence. They are seen from the feminist point of view through her writings. The protagonists of her novels are constantly trying to break the silence of suffering, and this made them strong and they struggle to free themselves from the shackles of tradition and

various traditions. All her novels observe the continuity with their predecessors in portraying the lives of Indian middleclass and lower-middle class families and above all their women members struggling to break the age-old silence against gender based domination and violence in the patriarchal Indian society. All her women protagonists are caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day.

Manju Kapur's female protagonists from *Virmati* to *Shagun* are the representative of that female folk who long to be free from the stale social customs and traditions but are never allowed. Her female protagonists are mostly educated. Their education leads them to independent thinking, for which their family and society becomes intolerant towards them. They struggle between tradition modernity. It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they plunge into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women with faultless backgrounds. (Gupta 11)

A Married Woman is the second novel of Manju Kapur. The novel is a tale of Astha from her childhood to her forties from side to side various hopes and miseries, complements and refusals, recognitions and aggravations. As Robert clearly mentions in his article,

'The novel *A Married Women* is heavily plotted. It traces the life of Astha from her young adulthood through her early middle years. In the process she dates with a couple of young men of her own choice like her western counter parts, marries a man of her parents' choice and discovers the joys of intimacy with her husband, begets children, yet grows distant from him ,and struggles to become a painter.'

Astha reflects values of the middle class and seems to enjoy her mental bliss for a long period. Gradually she feels that there is something certainly lacking in her life. She suffers from a sense of incompleteness, suppression and agony. It is further provoked by her involvement into the outer world of upheaval and protest. She seeks temporarily is also hollow from within and fails eventually compelling her heaving a sigh of relief. Amar Nath Prasad remarks in this context:

'Women are no longer flowers of the pot for only decoration; rather they are fragrant flowers of the open garden diffusing aroma to all comers, braving the storms and rains.'(qtd. in Gunjan 98).

Astha is chaired by her middle-class values where she wants to uplift herself to upperclass, but is always afraid of failing down to lower class. Her first encounter with Bunty and then with Rohan, fails because of her middle-class status and she accepts her fate and goes for arranged marriages where she plays the role of a typical Indian housewife but very soon gets frustrated in waiting for her husband after the work and taking care of children and in-laws. Astha is born and brought up in a traditional middle-class family. Her parents are very conscious of her needs and role in a middle-class family. Her mother is very protective of her and she expects her to conform to traditions. It is important to note that Manju Kapur allows the patriarchy to operate through the mother.

To sum up we can say that through the characters of novels, *Viramati* in "*Difficult Daughters*" and Astha in "*A Married Woman*", Manju Kapur gives a voice to women's frustrations, disappointment, and alienation in a patriarchal world. These are the novels which provokes our thoughts as to how *Viramati* and Astha, in search of their identity, registers their protests against existing patriarchal set up and emerges as an independent woman.

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