



## WOMEN EMANCIPATION IN THE SELECT WORKS OF MANJU KAPUR'S NOVELS

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### ABSTRACT:

*Physical Psychological Survival, Loneliness, Quest for identity, , Alienation, Contemporary Social Issues Human beings are fundamentally social creatures who depend on one another for their physical and psychological survival and well-being. Man is born with powerful needs for love, friendship and belonging and similarly he fears and avoids rejection, loneliness and the disapproval of others. There are a variety of relationships from a social and psychological perspective including attraction, love and mate selection; kinship, friendship and enmity; jealousy, betrayal and forgiveness; communication, conflict and aggression; and the processes involved in relationship breakdown and repair. Man- woman relationship and one individual with other individual relationship are complex structures and processes which are determined by different cultural perspectives.*



**KEYWORDS:** Manju Kapur's Novels, Women Emancipation.

### INTRODUCTION

Kapur is a postcolonial writer who intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems that every woman encounters in her life. Her novels present the longing struggle of women to establish an identity. Kapur has presented a vivid portrayal of the women of 1940s and the events revolve around the backdrop of Indian independence in *Difficult Daughters*. This paper aims to explore on Women's emancipation in pre-independence era the fight for autonomy and freedom was a combat in its early stages. So, women attempt to succeed in her fight to assert herself is to be esteemed for though she failed and defies the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert her identity and achieves self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment in her life.

Manju Kapur's literary sensibility projects itself in her novels as an acute form of national consciousness which propels the individual's progress in the modern world. It is possible to trace out in her novels an intelligible pattern of ideas that reveals her aesthetic assimilation of long established tradition under the disturbing impact of modernity. Kapur is very much interested in story and social comment rather than psychological characterization, complex technique or a profound vision of life. Her novels present a faithful account of contemporary Indian reality. Then she fully devotes herself in writing novels, because she finds that she can be more expressive in novels than in any other literary genres. She aspires for a secure and formidable place among the Indian English fiction writers. Her literary output comprises six novels namely *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2009), *Custody* (2011) and *Brothers* (2016). She has also edited a book titled *Shaping the World: Women Writers on Themselves* published in 2014 by Hay House, India.

Manju Kapur, a well known name in modern Indian English literature is widely known as the Jane Austen of India. Her novels deal with everything that is related to the modern family and the patriarchal society. Her novels present the contemporary picture of the today's woman who is eager to break free from the domestic walls of her house to build a world of her own. Her novels present a new woman who wants to identify for her 'self'. By the late seventies and eighties many women writers emerged with the issues related to women dealing with their family problems, domestic violence, health care, education, their work and their working conditions.

Manju Kapur is one among the contemporary novelists who takes her protagonists one step ahead of the others with the burning issues of modern world varying from lesbianism, infidelity, infertility, divorce and adoption. Kapur who is a well known literary artist in Indian English literature scene is a novelist of international repute. With six critically acclaimed novels to her credit, she stands on par equal and other women writers.

A modern writer with modern views and notions, Kapur knows that today's women are far more intellectual and mature than their predecessors. Her novels are chronicles of the Indian middle class society. They capture everything that comes in the course of time in a middle class family – sexual abuse, the politics of arranged marriages, infidelity, infertility, adoption, sexual dysfunction, family battles and many other domestic issues. Her protagonists are today's women who are not ready to submit to the age-old traditions and customs of patriarchal society.

As far as the present Indian scenario is concerned there are 'things of fall apart and centre cannot hold'. The individuality can no longer be kept in check. Hopefully, there may come about a realization among men and women that basic motive behind existence on this earth is procreation and enjoyment of the bounties of the nature. This may result in shedding of ego-clashes. Society then will be more harmonious and living becomes meaningful. Feminism will no longer be considered a reactionary and maverick movement aimed against men and patriarchal society. Hence Manju Kapur has made her protagonists to live hearing their inner voice not bothering the norms of patriarchy.

Manju Kapur speaks for the middle class and even has been earned several comparisons with Jane Austen for her sharp-eyed, finely turned character portraits that are caught in tricky situations. All the major women characters whether they are Virmati of *Difficult Daughters*, or Nina of *The Immigrants* all are on the verge of secluding themselves from the company of man. Kapur's women characters are under a psychological journey, searching a place for them in the male dominated society ab initio. Social and moral values are like bondage to them, so all of them are leading forward in an ambiguous manner in the midst of relentless urbanization and western influences.

Manju Kapur made herself as a debut writer in 1998 by publishing her first novel *Difficult Daughters*. It is the story of young woman, named Virmati born in Amritsar into an austere and high minded household. The story tells how she is torn in family duties, the desire for education and illicit love. This is a story of sorrow, love and compromise. The major portion deals with Virmati's love affairs with the Professor and her emergence as a new woman. Virmati is the eldest daughter of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash.

Kasturi has eleven children. One after another she gives birth to children and thus the whole burden of household work falls on Virmati's head as she is the eldest daughter of the family. Due to her busy routine she does not do well in her studies and fails. She falls in love with Harish, a professor who is already married.

The professor develops an intimate relationship with Virmati. Virmati's parents decide to marry her to an engineer, Inderjeet, but due to a sudden death in his family, marriage is postponed for two years. During this period Virmati passes her B.A. exam and denies marrying Inderjeet. The professor also insists Virmati on being firm in her decision for not to marry. Now Virmati becomes mentally disturbed and goes to Tarashika and drowns herself. She is saved by the servants of her grandfather. Everybody inquires the reason but finally she declares that she does not like the boy and wants to study further. So the marriage is settled down with Indumati, the second daughter of the family and Inderjeet.

Meanwhile, Virmati's grandfather encourages her to study further. So it is decided that Kasturi should go to Lahore with Virmati for Virmati to continue her higher education. Shakuntala who has

been a source of inspiration for Virmati, visits her regularly. Professor's course of meeting to her has yet not stopped and during this period she becomes pregnant. Virmati becomes restless and with the help of her roommate, Swarnalata, she gets abortion. After completing her B.T., she returns to Amritsar and is offered the principalship of a college in Sultanpur. Virmati takes the position as the principal of the college but there too Harish visits her and these meetings are observed by Lalaji, manager of the college.

Virmati is dismissed from the college and so she decides to go to Shanti Niketan but one the way, she accidentally meets Harish's poet friend. The poet does not let Virmati to go to Kolkata in her dejected mood. Instead he invites Harish and makes him to marry Virmati. Professor Harish returns to his home with Virmati. During her conjugal life Virmati feels that it would have been better if she had not been married Harish. After sometime, she gives birth to a daughter, Ida. At the beginning of the novel this girl Ida narrates her mother's life. The life of Virmati shows that mere education and economic independence are not enough to break the patriarchal norms. Determination and strong will power are necessary to assert one's self identity.

The novels of Manju Kapur voice well the sentiments of women and their selfintrospections. Virmati, Ida, Astha, Pipeelika, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, and Ishita – all are searching for their grounds interestingly from a wrong threshold. Manju Kapur was a teacher of English literature in Delhi University. Therefore her protagonists are also well-educated and their education leads them to independent thinking. It helps them to take a bold stand against the society's norm which is ready to tie them down with patriarchal rules and regulations. They understand the value of education as it is the only way to self-reliance. All her novels speak volumes with their language, style and narrative techniques. Her canvas is always larger than life. Capturing the minute details of everything she sees the intricate relationship of human beings through the prism of family.

Manju Kapur's second novel *A Married Woman* is the story of Astha, an educated, upper middle class working Delhi woman. As a girl, she is brought with the large supplements of fear. She is her parents' only child. Her education, her character, her marriage – these were all her parents' burden. But like a common school going girl she often imagines of romantic and handsome young man holding her in his strong manly embrace. In her adolescence, she falls in love with a boy of her age. Day and night the thought of him keeps her inside churning. In the meantime, she is emotionally engaged with Rohan and they enjoy physical relationship. This relationship comes to an end within a few days as Rohan moves to Oxford for his further studies. Then she marries Hemant who belongs to a bureaucrat family.

Astha soon gets fed up with her married life. She starts teaching in a public school after much resistance from her husband and in-laws. During her stay in the school she participates in workshop on communalism which is being led by an intellectual artist Aijaz Akhtar Khan, the founder of "The Street Theatre Group". Aijaz teaches history and during the holidays he performs plays in schools, slums, factories, streets, small towns and villages to create sympathy and to generate social awareness. Although Astha had been a mother of a son and a daughter by this time, she is fascinated by the multifarious personality of Aijaz. But soon her relationship with Aijaz also gets an abrupt end when he is killed during the campaign of Babri Masjid demolition.

The Street Theatre Group organizes various processions in order to establish religious harmony and social integration. During one such procession, Astha meets Pipeelika and she comes to know that Pipeelika is the young widowed wife of Aijaz. Astha takes great sympathy on Pipeelika and a powerful physical relationship is established between them. The relationship is a challenge for her husband and family. Astha and Pipeelika live together and deep emotional attachment develops between them. Astha is on the verge of losing her conventional marriage. Considering the welfare and future of both the ladies, Pipeelika leaves India to pursue Ph.D. study in abroad and Astha returns to her family. *A Married Woman* is beautiful, honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment, set at a time of political and religious turmoil.

*Home* is the third novel by Manju Kapur. This is a fast moving story of an ordinary middle class family's life in Delhi. Banwarilala, who does a cloth business, lives in New Delhi neighbourhood of Karol Bagh. He is the patriarchy of the family. He believes in the old ways of life. He thinks that man should work outside home and women within it. Men carry forward the family line, women enable their

mission. His two sons unquestioningly follow their father but their wives do not. Both brothers carry their lives as well as business according to the wishes of their father. As the time passes Banwarilal dies and the whole burden of the family comes to Yashpal, the eldest son.

Banwarilal has a daughter besides his two sons. The daughter of the family becomes widow in her early life. She had a child named Vicky. They also join them in their house in Karol Bagh. Sona and Rupa are wives of both the sons of Banwarilal. Sona and Rupa could not conceive for a long time after their marriage. Sona keeps fasting but it is of no use. Sona belongs to a rich family in comparison to her sister Rupa. Rupa's husband is an educated man. They pass their life happily. After a long time Sona gives birth to Nisha and then to Raju. Nisha is physically tortured by Vicky, her cousin.

Nisha feels mentally disturbed so she was sent to Rupa's home for a change. Here Nisha gets education too. After some time she returns to her home at where none pays much attention towards her studies. However, she completes her schooling and enters into college education. In college she meets a boy and decides to marry him ignoring his caste and creed but fails in doing so, and later on, she has to wait for a long time in spite of all her physical and mental attainments due to astrological reasons.

Manju Kapur's contributions are marvelous in the field of Indian English fiction. She shows her unique strength and vitality in the presentation of various thematic perceptions in her novels. The most discussed themes of feminism and also human relationship can be seen in her novels with different modes and degrees. She ventures deep into human emotions and passions and presents different shades of human relationship with minute details and nuances. She seems to be the novelists of modern Indian woman who is in the state of transformation in the era of globalization. She has a much social concern and so she has brought out the impact of Babri-Masjid demolition, Hindu-Muslim riot, Partition, and globalization without marring the spirit of the plots of every novel. She seems to be the real spoke woman of modern women in modern Indian English writing. Her novels are able to present the picture of human life in a detailed manner.

Renu R. Dalela comments on treatment of women in Kapur's novels and she states: Kapur highlights those issues of feminism that are endemic to the situation in India in order to help us understand how difficult it is for women here to arrive at an evolved state of mind being trapped within the matrix of religion and tradition. Her novels manifest women's struggle for emancipation from economic, political and social bondages. She has tried to evolve her own stream of emergence of new women grounded in reality. (Ali 50)

Manju Kapur supports the idea that woman cannot throw away the presence of man from her life, because as per the universal doctrine both the sexes are needed for the procreation. So Kapur strongly believes that a woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a sub-ordinate and relative position in Indian society. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha and Pipeelika in *A Married Woman*, Shagun and Ishita in *Custody* show their individuality and rebellious nature and they confront with their male counterparts to show their will and determination. However, at no point they feel that they could live without their men. Virmati relates herself to Harish. Astha after her short tryst with Pipeelika once again goes to Hemant to carry out her life with the family without any tussle. Shagun though snatches her root from Raman, yet she prefers to live with Ashok. Like Shagun, Ishita also divorced from her husband and then agrees to marry Raman to have a contented family life with the children. Manju Kapur matches and contradicts while treating the social issues of India, dealing with man-woman relationship in marriage and portraying the characters in their works. Kapur has ensured a prominent place among the contemporary Indian women novelists in English for their deep concern for Indian women and unique style of presenting her views.

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