



## CHANGING IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

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### ABSTRACT

*Indian women novelists have been portraying women in various manifestations. But recently, the remarkable range of India's most accomplished women writers of post-colonial strand has brought a tremendous change in the trend of depicting women characters. Women writers as Kamala Markendaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, Manju Kapur, Gita Hariharan and the others have intuitively perceived the gender issues upsetting women and presented women as an individual who fight against suppression and oppression of the patriarchy. Women have to be obedient, quiet, submissive, and passive not claiming any of their rights neither as women nor as human beings. The present paper analyses the patriarchal norms confronted by the women characters in Manju Kapur's novels. Kapur has presented the women of the 1940s, when women had no voice to assert their rights, most importantly the voice of the protagonist. She raises the voice against male chauvinism to claim the rights of economic independence. Kapur makes the woman a cult figure that fights against taboos, social and joint family restrictions and constraints laid by patriarchy in the tradition.*

**Key Words:** *Women Identity, Patriarchal Society, Tradition and Modernity, Changing Image of Women*

### INTRODUCTION

Even the earlier Indian women novelists have been portraying women as the silent sufferers, the upholder of traditional values and ethics, a strict observer of social taboos, an essence of tolerance and patience, a being with no space for herself, a woman without an identity, a

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worshipper of their counterparts, unfortunate and ignorant about their rights as human and so on. Recently, fortunately there is a tremendous change in this trend, with the advent of feminism. Women are no longer characterized to surrender, submit and suffer to martyrdom. Women novelists unveil the hidden secrets and enfold the deliberate denials that are refutable in today's context.

There is a myth associated with the creation of woman. As per the myth Brahma first created man. He thought to give man a companion. But he had exhausted all the material in the creation of man hence he borrowed several components from the beautiful creation of nature and made woman. So woman is also called as prakriti. Then Brahma presented woman to his earlier creation man saying, "She will serve you lifelong and if you cannot live with her, neither can you live without her". This primordial myth carries an unmistakable implication of woman's image in life and literature for centuries. The primordial myth gave woman her stereotypical identity which has been reinforced by the archetypes for ages.

The two great epics of India, the Ramayana by Valmiki and, the Mahabharata by Mahirishi Vyas, move around two central women characters Sita and Draupadi. These two women as has been suggested are two poles of feminine experiences. Sita absorbs all inflicted misery and humiliation and Draupadi challenges male ego. In the Vedic period, women were given the status of devis. Her status, rights, and roles need to be defined. In this period we can found the roots of patriarchy. Widows have a permitted in this period. A number of references are found about the remarriage in vedas.

The Medieval period was considered the "Dark Ages" for Indian women. In this period the status of woman declined. They faced hardship and cruelty due to evil practices. Child Marriage, Widowhood, Prostitution, custom of Sati and Devdasi are the product of medieval period. When the Mughals and the British invaded India, they brought with them their own culture. This has in some cases adversely affected the condition of women. As the results of the Islamic culture, Indian women started using 'Purdah', to cover their face and body.

They were not allowed to move freely outside their home. This gave rise to some new evils like Child Marriage, Sati, Jauhar and restriction on girl education. Women's are confined in the four walls home, children and religion. They lost the confidence and ability to think individually. This continues till long period. Then the condition of women started to change when the social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasager, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, and Mahatma Gandhi started social reform in the pre-independent period.

The status of women in modern India is contradictory. On the one hand, she is considered at the peak of ladder of success; on the other hand, she is mutely suffering the violence. Women

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have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battle field of life, fully armored with their talent.

In India traditional male dominating Indian society both men and women writers have presented woman, primarily as mother, wife, mistress and sex object. The writers had not shown woman as an achiever and if present it is considered as an exception. There no much importance is given to woman's individual self. Despite these, women today have begun to realize that they are independent. In the modern time a woman has also become a breadwinner. Her new empowered image is reflected in the Indian English novels. Indian woman writers explore the feminine subjectivity.

### Image of Women in the novels of Manju Kapur:

In the first phase of Indian women novelists, the major focus was on social reformation. The second phase of Indian women novelist is more focused on the challenges and predicaments of women. Among many leading Indian feminist women writers writing in English, Manju Kapur is one who has created absolutely different pattern of female characters.

Manju Kapur is a prominent post-colonial woman novelist writing in English. She has written five full length novels to this date viz. *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody*. The present study examines Manju Kapur's five novels with images of women reflecting on them. Her female protagonists are fighting hard for their rights in a patriarchal society. Her women protagonists are struck between tradition and modernity.

Manju Kapur has portrayed memorable women characters. All her novels consist a variety of women characters as well as her all novels are women character centric. Her women characters bring forth the various shades of the lives of women. Through her women characters, she shows a mirror to the society saying what the condition of middle class women is in a patriarchal society. It also traced that the many women characters are autobiographical.

In the changed cultural circumstances, Manju Kapur's women characters do not largely become the victims of their male counterparts of patriarchal society but they are shown with their own new problems as new responsibilities, availability of equal opportunity, social limitations and new freedom etc. They can go to any level to fulfill their desires although they pay heavy price for their desires. They want to live their life freely. They face trials and tribulations. They are full of self-confidence. All the images of female protagonists are compared with each other to find varieties in images portrayed by her. Her female protagonists *Virmati in Difficult Daughters*, *Aastha in A Married Woman*, *Nisha in Home*,



*Nina in The Immigrant and Shagun and Ishita in Custody* are studied in this paper. All female protagonists of her are self-reliant.

**Virmati**, the protagonist in *Difficult Daughters*, is presented as positive and courageous woman in a particular society. The novel is set on pre independent India, 1940 and at that time Virmati opposes the tradition of arranged marriage. Then she gets education with a hope of living her life in her own ways. But the crisis comes when she falls in love with a professor and at last, out of compelling circumstances gets him married being a second wife. This is what Manju Kapur primarily focuses on the portrayal of her women characters with their new conditions and their new problems. The story moves further bringing in the daughters of Virmati, Ida, who reflects the image of women's condition but by denying to be like her mother.

In the similar way, **Astha** in *A Married Woman* represents the journey of women through hope and despair. It is a journey of Astha from being only a wife to having an independent identity. She is married to Hemant and settles in New Delhi. Initially she is happy even gives birth to two children. But after some time, she feels alone and need to explore life in Hemant's timeless situation. Meanwhile, she comes in contact with Pipee, a widow, and their loneliness turns into an intimate relationship. After sometime, she feels, as it, caught in a traumatic situation of not being able to remain on any of the sides. Hence, here the journey of Astha is shown in a change circumstances with her own problems. Based on the problem of the women characters their solution, their struggles one can say that Manju Kapur has created a pattern of new women characters reflecting their new problems.

In her works, the problems of women are not product of patriarchal system but individual. It a story of **Nisha** of *Home*, who tries to make her life on her own way but her parents do not allow her. A long background of Nisha's family has been described beginning from Banwarilal. Once she is sent to her relative Rupa's house. There she falls in love with Suresh, a boy from low caste. Due to the caste of the boy, Suresh, she is not allowed to marry him. Then after being failing to find a suitable boy for her, she starts her own business. Meanwhile, a Mangli suitable boy, Yashpal is found and married to her. Nisha continues her business after marriage but soon she gets pregnant and leaves business. Here, Manju Kapur comes with a new set of characters with new problems like inter-caste marriage, finding a Mangli suitable boy within a caste, running business by a woman etc.

The protagonist **Nina's** emigrant experience has been narrated in *The Immigrant*. The novel begins and ends with a same point of Nina's life. Here, Nina's journey has been shown in three stages where in first stage she falls in love with Rahul. Then she marries Anand and both of them migrate to Canada for their new life. They have sexual conflicts both fall in love with other characters, Anand with Mandy and Nina with Anton. It is shown that in her all



experiences, she is treated as an object and misused. At the end she returns back to her home in India. This novel depicts life of Nina in a Modern situation, having freedom or taking freedom to have many relationships but ultimately being despaired.

While the novel **Custody** depicts the lives of two couples Ashok - **Shagun** and Raman-**Ishita**. Where in earlier Shagun and Raman are married but later get divorce and then the story of the custody of their children takes place. Here, Kapur comes with all together, different characters and situations. This is how various women characters as protagonists in the works of Manju Kapur are depicted. All these characters create various images of women in Indian past and present society.

Her women protagonists show the courage to be independent but at last surrender themselves to male dominance. Here, though the women characters are not in the direct violent conflict with the male, it shows how slowly but cruelly the patriarchal system is in its effect. Astha realizes her own identity, and becomes rebellious for creating her own independent identity. While Nisha too wants to rebel against society for getting married to a lower caste boy but eventually when she fails, she constructs her identity through her own business.

### Conclusion:

Studying the novels of Manju Kapur, it can be canceled that she has drawn a range of images of women in her novels. Her novels present the women as protagonists with their own problems like the problem of woman's independent identity, taking decision for their own lives, having freedom of love, caste system, infertility as a curse, divorce, extra marital affair in want of love, economy independently etc. The large panoramic view of women in her novels is mirror to society. The range of images reflected in her works may help the people to understand their society in a better way.

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