



THEME OF ADAPTATION AND COMIC SENSE IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

SANJIV RANJAN

Research Scholar

Department of English

Jai Prakash University, Chapra

(BH) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Manju Kapur is a very prominent Indian Women novelist. She is famous for her feminist approach. Her novels mostly deal with the problems of women. She raises so many social issues. But her chief concern is the suffering of woman. She is in favor of woman's freedom from male domination. Manju Kapur writes about the demerits of patriarchal society. Her novels mostly discuss the pain and trauma of suppressed women. She shows in her novels that women want to reject the idea of submission and sacrifice.

Keywords: *Manju Kapur, Feminism, Consciousness, Patriarchal Indian Society, Identity Crisis*

INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur has earned coveted status among the modern Indian English women novelists. She registers her concern for the Indian women and deals with various – feministic issues like female education, their empowerment, financial independence of women's sexual abuse, etc. Kapur displays mature understanding of the female-psyche in portraying the inner subtlety of a women's mind, as she has intellectually described through her novels, the different states of women's mind in altered circumstances. She narrates important issues of class and nationhood and connects them to the emerging sense of female identity in postcolonial India. As a post colonial writer Manju Kapur has significantly contributed to the progression of Indian fiction. She innately realizes the position of women in the patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women - Her novels illustrate how the women of modern age in India are torn between tradition and modernity in trying to shape her life in her own ways. All her

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protagonists oppose against the social rules to become self dependent, but finally compromise for the sake of social harmony. Kapur is aware of the seriousness of the Indian woman's dilemma and generation old struggles behind it, but she believes that a positive change in her social status can materialize by bringing about a change in her mindset and making her literate and well informed.

Today the issue of 'gender discrimination' or 'women's predicament' is gaining ground all over the world- and now the new women of India and her quest for identity is the key concern. Women are seen raising their voices against patriarchal domination. In this regard, the contribution of Manju Kapur can't be overlooked. She has to her credit various novels in which she has portrayed not only the trials and tribulations of an average Indian women but also a number of virtuous qualities of women as wife, mother and daughter. Through this research work, we would try our best to raise all those problems faced by women so as to provide a workable solution for this great problem of gender discrimination and women's predicament.

Manju Kapur has an illustrious career in the field of modernism. She was born in 1948 in Amritsar, India. She was a Professor of English at Miranda House Delhi University under the name Manju Kapur Dalmia. She studied and received an MA Degree in 1972 from Delhousie University in Halifax, Canada and M. Phil from Delhi University. She is married to Gun Nidhi Dalmia, and has three children. Presently she lives in Delhi.

Kapur very first novel *Difficult Daughters* came in 1988 and won the "Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best first Book" (Eurasia) in 1999, and was a number one best seller in India. Her second novel *A Married Woman* was published in 2002. The novel was called "Fluent and Witty" in the 'Independent'. It was followed by *Home* in 2006. *Home* was described as "glistening with details and emotional acuity" in the 'Sunday times'. Kapur's fourth novel *The Immigrant* came in 2008 and was shortlisted for DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2011. Her novel *Custody* was also published in 2011. A noted daily soap on Indian television – "Yeh Hain Mohabbatein", produced by Balaji telefilms, was based on her novel *Custody*. *Brothers* (2016) is Manju Kapur's sixth novel, and much like the previous ones, it highlights the lives of a woman in multiple locations, rural, urban, domestic, public.

Manju Kapur, a well known name in Modern Anglo Indian 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 today's women who is eager to search an identity for herself. A modern writer with modern views and notions, Kapur knows that today's women are far more intellectual and mature than their predecessor. Her novels are the 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, divorce, sexual dysfunctions, family battles and many more issues. Her protagonists are today's women who are not ready to submit to the age-old traditions and customs of patriarchal society. Kapur's novels reveal an idea of feminist struggle against biases. As Durani says, "Our closed society considered it obscene for a woman to reveal her intimate secrets but would not silence be a great crime?" (Durani, 375)

Manju Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individuals caged within the confine of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. In the conservative society, for a woman, the home has been considered the only area of activity where she is supposed to find satisfaction in performing her duties in different roles- mother, sister, daughter, daughter-in-law etc. Her desire to go beyond the limits of home is considered to be wrong as home is considered her place of duty. The women who have been carrying the burden of embarrassment since ages, want to be free now. And in a male dominated society, Manju Kapur succeeds in bringing the real picture of women. The present study is an attempt to bring out the changing images of women in Kapur's novels from tradition to modern and post-modern era.

Manju Kapur has portrayed memorable women characters. All her novels consist of a variety of women characters as well as her novels are women characters 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 denoting the condition of middle class women in a patriarchal society. In the changed cultural circumstances, Manju Kapur's women characters do not become the victims of their male counterparts of patriarchal society. Rather they are shown facing new problems with the upcoming of new responsibilities, availability of equal opportunity, social limitations and new freedom.

In her very first novel *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur presents a traditional family that considers a woman's education secondary, while giving importance to marriage and family duties as her primary duties. Virmati's mother is of conservative thinking and her father comes under the category of a benevolent patriarch. The novel deals with the conflict between traditional and the modern society. Virmati is a difficult daughter, who unlike her mother is not ready to blindly succumb herself to the age-old norms. Kasturi holds patriarchal values as an ideal inheritor, as her daughter rebels against such values, she takes it as a rebellion against her ownself. By suppressing Virmati's desire for freedom, she turns out to be a voice of patriarchy. Virmati's struggle to acquire higher education and self dependence continues further. The novel is about educating daughters and facing the consequences when they learn to think for themselves and begin to question the basic values of society. It is the old conflict



again between the demands of modernity and tradition enacted this time in an upright, high-minded, middle-class Punjabi Lalaji family in the 1930's and 1940's.

Set around the historical background of India's partition. *Difficult Daughters* is the story that focuses on the relationship between the mothers and daughters who belong to different generations. It is the story of a woman caught in between the sentimental situations of her family and her longing for education and her quest of identity. There are different perspectives between the female characters about exciting culture and norms. When Kasturi, the mother of the protagonists, Virmati, compels her daughter to accept the marriage as a traditional norm, Virmati refuses the proposal, rather she seeks knowledge. The narrator of the novel, Ida, is Virmati's daughter. Through her voice the novelist distinguishes the women from three generations. Manju Kapur takes Virmati as her mouthpiece and through her she highlights the marginalization suffered by women who are primarily concerned about their individuality and dignity. Manju Kapur successfully presents different shades of life, painted on the canvas of *Difficult Daughters*.

Kapur's preoccupation with the female revolt against deep rooted family values and the institution of marriage is followed through to her second novel, *A Married Woman*. It is the story of Ashta, a young woman brought up in Delhi in a typical middle-class household. Ashta succumbs to her parents finding her a husband in the traditional arranged manner. Within the matrix 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 teaching profession as well as bearing two children. Yet somehow, underneath all this, lies a life of repression and anguish. Against the backdrop of communal unrest in India with the Hindu-Muslim conflict over sacred ground in Ayodhya, Ms. Kapur develops the unrest within Ashta's life. Her marriage becomes questionable after she involves herself in the outer world of rebellion and protest.

In depicting the inner subtlety of a woman's mind, Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Most of all, Kapur manages to blend the personal with the external. She speaks as some-one who has lived through the unrest of the communal riots, which in some way affected the lives of all Indians. There have been major historical events and Kapur has entwined them with simplicity and understanding into the lives of Ashta and Pipeelika. However, occasionally Kapur's rendition of a lesbian relationship sometimes distracts the reader from the tensions of the situation and the core sensibilities of the characters. Nevertheless, *A Married Woman* is a well-balanced depiction of the inner development – its strengths and its failures- and the anguish of a woman's unrest, which is as complicated as the social and political upheaval going on around her. As Robert mentioned in his articles:



The novel A Married Woman 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. Much against her husband and her other family members she becomes a social activist, and falls in love with a woman, and finds herself a sort of, more. (Rationale, 102)

Manju Kapur is a genius to portray the vulnerable condition of women in our society. Her novels are like vast colourful canvas with variant and vibrant women characters. Kapur's novels reveal the life of women, their struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival. With education, they become aware of their self reliance that is proved in concern with new women. Now they have considerable freedom of expression and thought. In every field they have proved their existence.

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