



CHANGING IMAGES OF WOMAN IN MANJU KAPUR'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Woman in Manju Kapur's novels seems to be a personification of a new woman, who has been continuously trying to throw off the burden of inhibitions she has carried for ages. She is aware of the seriousness of the Indian woman's dilemma and her generation old struggles behind it, but she believes that a positive change in her social status can materialize by bringing a change in her mind-set and making her literate and well-informed. Understanding the female psyche and depicting the inner subtlety, she portrays the images of her protagonists- Virmati, Nisha and Astha with the changing idea. The glorified woman is transformed into a real woman in the novels of Kapur.

Keywords: Burden of inhibitions, Indian woman's dilemma, Inner subtlety.

INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur has arisen among some of the women writers that are forming a body of Indian literature that is committed to feminist and social issues. She has earned a highly regarded status among the modern Indian English women novelists. Her novels

illustrate how the woman of modern age in India is torn between tradition and modernity in trying to shape her life in her own ways. She is one of the novelists on whom the suffering but assertive woman has left a noteworthy impact. Her protagonists

want to assert their individuality, carry their responsibilities on their own and prove their existence in a culture where individualism and protest have often remained foreign ideas, and marital bliss and a woman's role at home is the central focus. Kapur displays mature understanding of the female psyche in portraying the inner subtlety of a woman's mind, as they have intellectually described through their novels, the different states of woman's mind in altered circumstances. The concept of the new woman in Indian society varies from the one in the West; therefore, the characterization in the novels of Manju Kapur is based on a ground reality. Manju Kapur registers her concern for the Indian woman and deals with various feministic issues like female education, their empowerment, financial independence, eradication of child marriages, the abolition of the dowry system, elimination of a woman's sexual abuse, etc. Kapur who herself was an English lecturer at Miranda House Delhi, has taken up cudgels to fight for woman's cause. She narrates important issues of class and nationhood and connects them to the emerging sense of female identity in postcolonial India.

The novelist is quite down to earth in her feminist approach to the woman's

problems. All her protagonists protest against the social rules to become self-dependent, but finally compromise for the sake of social harmony. She is aware of the seriousness of the Indian woman's dilemma and her generation old struggles behind it, but she believes that a positive change in her social status can materialize by bringing a change in her mind-set and making her literate and well-informed. Kapur truly considers her role as an Indian feminist as well as humanist feminist. Literature is considered to be the reflection of life, and now the new woman of India and her quest for identity is the key concern. A variety of shades of woman's mind and plight are reflected through Indian women novelists, writing in the English language. Manju Kapur has made an important contribution in this field, by portraying the confident, ambitious, enterprising and individualized woman who demands attention, equality and peace through her novels. The writer draws the images of the woman who is rising in power and strength, claiming responsibility for their life and declaring that society will be better with effective and capable females.

CHANGING IMAGES OF WOMAN: FROM TRADITION TO MODERN

The women's question today is, therefore, no longer an issue confined to the position of women within the family or their rights to equality with men in different aspects of social life. It is part of the total, far broader question regarding the direction of change that our society is taking - economic, social, political, and the intellectual perception and analysis of that process. A woman seeks her goals in the ordinary tasks of womanhood, of serving her family members. She often does not find what she strives for. The ancient consciousness of a woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, seems in her to have brimmed and over-flowed, and uttered a demand for emancipation. Her female protagonists fight endless battles to survive. It is noteworthy that the novelist expresses deep concern about the problems, being faced by a woman in male-dominated domain. She deals primarily with the problems, faced by the Indian woman. Her educated protagonists try to assert their individuality and make an attempt to lead a liberal life. In all her novels, we meet the woman of modern era, her problems and her desire to become independent. The husband-wife relationship has been taken up as a

major theme in all her novels. She exposes the exploitative trends of the patriarchal society in which male plays the dominating role, and portrays the woman who wants changes in the norms of traditions. Purposefully, Kapur emphasizes on the changing images of woman, from tradition into modern, increasingly.

EMERGENCE OF NEW WOMAN

Woman in Kapur's novels seems to be a personification of a new woman, who has been continuously trying to throw off the burden of inhibitions she has carried for ages. We note a remarkable change in the protagonists. The glorified woman is transformed into a real woman in the novels of Kapur. The modern new woman doesn't want to be the rubber doll for the other hand to move according to their will, they can fight endless battles to uplift her position and survive in society. The writer understands the female psyche and depicted the inner subtlety of woman's mind through her novels. We see the budding of a new woman in her novels, as her protagonists want to assert their individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. The titles of the novels are cosy, linear plots and language easy to understand. The theme of the novels is the struggle of modern woman

to elevate her position in the society where they are still slaves to customs, parents, husband and children.

VIRMATI AND NISHA: PROTEST AGAINST THE PATRIARCHY

The life of the two protagonists of Manju Kapur's two novels, *Virmati* in *Difficult Daughters* and *Nisha* in *Home* illuminates their protest against the patriarchal families to emerge as new women. The novels under study are the evidence of the fact that a woman can easily be manipulated because of her emotional approach and lack of education. Due to her age old subjugation, she herself feels inferior to man and can easily be influenced and manipulated. In *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 objectives. *Virmati's* mother is cast in the conventional mould. Her father comes under the category of a benevolent patriarch. In this novel, patriarchy operates in a different manner. The novel deals with the conflict between traditional and the modern society. *Virmati* is a difficult daughter, who unlike her mother's willingly surrendering to the destined social role, is not ready to blindly

succumb herself to the long established norms. *Kasturi* holds patriarchal values as an ideal inheritor, as her daughter rebels against such values, she takes it as a rebellion against her own self. By suppressing *Virmati's* desire for freedom, she turns out to be a voice of patriarchy. *Virmati's* rebellion against the patriarchal norms is presented in detail. *Virmati's* struggle to acquire higher education and self-dependence is gone through the analysis. The novel, *Home*, exposes the still prevalent narrow-minded attitude towards the upbringing of a girl child in India. Kapur traces the painful journey of the protagonist, *Nisha*, from childhood into adulthood in search of self-identity. The analysis reveals *Nisha's* search for a home i.e. search for a place of shelter and security. Unfortunately, to a woman in India, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional security, nonetheless, it sometimes does not provide them any physical security.

The novel describes the story of an ordinary middle class joint family, settled in Delhi. The physical abuse of children, in the hands of their own relatives, is also discussed through *Nisha's* sexual abuse by her own cousin, *Vicky*. A girl is considered as an object of sexual arousal, thus it is

expected that she should take care of her physical appearance, to be able to grab the attention of people as a perfect marriageable girl. Nisha's mother, Sona, always shoves her to be neat and well-dressed like a princess. She does not allow her to play in parks with other children because her complexion may become dark. The displacement that protagonists suffer and the suffocation that they face in the traditional limits of marriage and family is clearly brought out by the novelist. After the physical abuse, Nisha feels mentally disturbed so she is sent to Rupa's home for a change. There she gets education well. After sometime, she returns to her home where no one pays much attention towards her studies. Then she is guided by Premnath. She passes in it and enters college for getting higher education. She meets a boy and decides to marry him ignoring his caste and creed.

ASTHA: TORN BETWEEN DISCONTENTMENT AND RESTLESSNESS

A Married Woman deals with women's issues in the present context. It is an honest and seductive story of love, passion and attachment set at the time of political and religious turmoil in India. Driven by a powerful physical relationship

with a much younger woman, the main character of the novel risks losing the acquisitions of her conventional marriage and safe family. The novel raises the controversial issue of homosexual relationship in a challenging way. After all gay and lesbian relationships are not mere fancies. This is getting more and more visible in modern societies though we may or may not accept it. As a married woman Astha, the protagonist, becomes an enduring wife and sacrificing mother. Her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of "mother and father" for her children. This denies her self-fulfillment and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Discontentment leads her to defiance and restlessness. Her anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation do not encourage her to give voice to her unhappiness over her troubled relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the challenges of her life. Restlessness drives her to enjoy absolute loneliness, a sort of entrapment by the family, its commitments, its subtle oppression and she yearns for freedom.

In the midst of a family and its vast minefield of income, expenditure, rights,

responsibilities, knowledge, discontent, restlessness and dependency, Astha enjoys the fate of the poorest. She is suffocated with the growing needs of her family and "always adjusting to everybody's needs". (227) Astha understands a married woman's place in the family to be that of an unpaid servant or a slave and the thought of divorce brings social and economic death in her Indian status. She feels for herself that "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth", (231) are the necessary prerequisites of a married woman. She contemplates marriage a terrible decision as it puts her in a lot to enjoy bouts of rage, pain and indecision. Judging the male impression of woman she thinks that a married woman is an object of "mind fucking". (218) She does not think "marriage is just sex" (275) rather it provides interest, togetherness and respect. Being torn between her duty and responsibility, faith and fact, public ethos and personal ethics she thinks "a tired woman cannot make good wives", (154) and struggles for an emotional freedom from the scourge of the nation. In *A Married Woman* (2002), the second of her three novels, Manju Kapur frankly depicts the love affair between two women, but less attention has been paid to the historical and political

context in which that relationship develops. The tale that unfolds powerfully explores how in a still-traditionalist India entering the age of globalization, the personal relations on the micro social level are shaped by wider historical forces. It can in their turn reshape that same history in an adumbration, potentially utopian even if partial and temporary, of new and more diverse forms of human relationship. In her interview with Nivedita Mukherjee, Kapur says, —it is an attempt to inject an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as a relationship with a man. The novel exposes the domestic relationship. Kapur has remained very truthful in presenting the women and the challenges they face in their personal, professional, religious and socio-political levels. Manju Kapur presents in her novels the changing image of women moving away from the traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women towards the self-assured, assertive and ambitious women thereby making society aware of their demands and in this way providing a medium for self-expression.

WOMAN WITH THE CHANGING IMAGES- A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POSSESSING AND PROTECTING

Manju Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individual caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity. It is their individual struggle with family and society through which they plunged into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women with faultless backgrounds. The novelist has portrayed her protagonists as a woman 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. The writer addresses many issues that are related to the middle class women. Whether or not a girl has the right to make her own choices in life is an issue dragged this way and that, for a long time in our country. There is after all a difference between possessing and protecting. Facing equal assault from the chauvinists who declare that woman's place is inside the house, and the feminists who condemn the idea of taking the husband's surname after

marriage, the idea 'Changing images' finds a middle path here.

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