

“Resurgence of Women” A Gender Perspectives in The Select Novels Manju Kapur

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Abstract

This research paper undertakes exploration into the theme of women's resurgence in select novels by Manju Kapur, namely "Difficult Daughters", "A Married Woman", "Home", and "The Immigrant". The study attempts to discuss how Kapur's protagonists navigate through the complex web of societal expectations, personal aspirations, and identity quests through a gendered perspective. This analysis reveals the characters transformation from being passive recipients of patriarchal norms to active agents of change. The paper explores with bias the sensitive portrayal of struggles and triumphs that women go through in these novels, bringing about changes in women's roles within contemporary Indian society and their relentless pursuit of autonomy and self-realization. The present research shall, therefore, attempt to contribute to the immense discussion related to gender dynamics and the literary representation of womanly empowerment in Indian society.

Keywords: Resurgence, Gender perspectives, Autonomy, Patriarchal oppression, Gender injustices.

Introduction

Before independence, the English-language Indian novel was primarily written by men, with relatively few female authors including Toru Dutt, Raj Lakshmi Debi, Krupabai Sathinadhan, Cornelia Sorabji and Sawarnkumari Ghosal appeared after the end of the 1800s. However, in the years following independence, there several female authors entered the literary landscape, including Anita Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Desai, and the younger Githa generation, Suniti Namjoshi, Shobha De, Namita Gokhale, Hariharan, Nina Sibal, Manju Kapur, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy who have significantly influenced and contributed to the development of Indian English novels. Each has written about gender politics and external issues determining the link between genders. They describe lives with greater sensitivity and women's issues compared to those of the male authors. The project of their novels creates social circumstances, criticism, and the experiences of women.

Literature is an effective way to convey ideas and thoughts, and it allows writers to use their creativity

to shape, inspire, communicate, and dramatize readers' shared interests. It also acts as a catalyst for change, particularly for the underprivileged and silenced groups whose voice is ignored. The objectives of writers in society are constantly complex as they look for a place in history. of literature in addition to working to transform society. The profession of the writers' fights for harmony and the betterment of the community in particular, and humanity in general. The inner self is predicted by literature, which has been a powerful tool in the hands of feminist authors to develop, address, and change.

Indian literature has been dominated by the physical, emotional, and psychological conditions of patriarchal dominance. The themes, plots, and rhetoric are full of patriarchal dominance. The literature acts as a voice to the suppressed community in reconfiguring the idea of the women about the downtrodden women. Initially, women's writing began as a form of protest and the feminist literature was not well received due to the lack of women readers.

Manju Kapur is a unique storyteller who presents the post-modern novel with a traditional narrative

idea. She is regarded as a chronicler of the urban middle-class milieu. She has emerged as the most reflective voice of Indian Writing in English in the last decade of the twentieth century. Manju Kapur's debut novel, *Difficult Daughters* is set in the scenario of India's freedom struggle. It describes the life of a Punjabi family containing women of three generations. The story moves around Ida, the narrator and divorcee, her mother Virmati, born into an austere Arya Samaji household, and Kasturi, Ida's grandmother who is conventional and has a conflict with her difficult daughter Virmati. Ida, to know the story of her mother she could never understand, sets out on a journey to Amritsar searching for her mother's past. Virmati is torn between her devotion and loyalty to family, the desire for education, and her illicit affair with Professor Harish, who is already married. Virmati, the eldest daughter of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash is troubled with household activities because of her mother's continuous pregnancies. She seemed to be the second mother of her ten sisters and brothers. Due to her busy routine domestic deeds, she fails in her FA exams. Her family wants her to get married as they are restless. When completing her B.T., she is offered a principalship at a college. Harish visits here too and so she is dismissed. Both of them, get married and Virmati comes to the professor's house as his second wife. She gets hateful gestures and pariah status in her nuptial home. She has to lose the relations she had with her family because of her marriage against the social values prevalent in society. During her marital life, Virmati senses the restricted physical space. Harish denies leaving his first wife and the effects on Virmati are harsh. Virmati loses all her sense and identity. She is psychologically tormented by her own family and her husband.

Her next novel, *A Married Woman* traces the societal and psychological emotions and changes. The Manch asks her to create a picture. She finds her 'self' in her paintings. Astha traverses all the limits to fulfill her duties related to Manch. Astha's aspiration for independence begins with her trip to Ayodhya. She meets Pipeelika, Aijaz's widow. Pipeelika has a major influence on Astha's quest. She is attracted to Pipeelika. They share an intimate love and concern. The relationship is a challenge for her husband and family. From a self-effacing self,

she discovers her true and strong self in the company of Pipeelika. Astha's gradual maturity empowers her from within. She returns to her marital home and her children when Pipee leaves India to study abroad. Astha tries to be a typical Indian traditional woman at home. At the same time, she tries to reshape herself. She struggles against the patriarchal norms for her identity. Kapur has set the novel against the backdrop of the most controversial Babri Masjid issue. The social and political disarray of the nation is as complicated as the internal aspiration and anguish of her protagonist. Manju Kapur, through Astha portrays the dilemma of the urban middle-class educated women who experience discontent in their lives as they suffer from identity crisis despite their material comfort. Further, the novel constructs a deep understanding of Indian women, their longings, their view of companionship, the idea of freedom, and the need to be accepted and respected as a human being with equal rights and aspirations.

Kapur's third novel *Home* revolves around the joint family of Banwari Lal, the patriarch of a cloth business at Karol Bagh, Delhi. It brings to the limelight the still existing parochial attitudes towards the upbringing of a girl child. The story weaves around three female characters: Sona, Rupa, and Nisha. They try to assert their identity in their own way. Rupa is childless throughout the story, but she is not subjected to taunts from the in-laws for having no child. Sona is insulted and sneered for barrenness for years. Soon she is blessed with a daughter Nisha and a son Raju. Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky. She feels mentally disturbed, so she grows under the care of her aunt Rupa. Here she gets an education and grows as a rebel. While in college, she meets a boy named Suresh and decides to marry him but he betrays her at the time of crisis. Then she suffers from the growth of poor skin condition that increases her mental agony. It also delays her marriage prospects. Although she has suppressed her self-respect and individuality over the years, it triggers her to become a successful businesswoman by starting "Nisha's Creations." She designs suits and markets to top sellers. She is married to a widower, Arvind. While she is in the family way, she hands over the business to her sister-in-law. Finally, Nisha leaves aside her business

and joins to accept the responsibilities of motherhood. All her dreams vanish and she feels that "her body again decided her fate" (Home 324). The power struggles of a joint family, the conflict between tradition and modernity, gender discrimination, the age-old conventional beliefs, and psychological trauma have been graphically presented by Manju Kapur.

The Immigrant, Kapur's fourth novel is the story of two immigrant Indians, Nina and Ananda. "The Immigrant is the portrayal of the stereotypical perspective of women in the patriarchal form of society where discrimination is integral to the female life percolating down to education, grooming, and even education" (Tripathy 160). By providing a glimpse into the life of Nina and Ananda, Kapur portrays the inner turmoil of the immigrants. Nina, a thirty-year-old English lecturer, marries Ananda, a dentist in Canada, and moves to Halifax, Canada. She faces humiliation at the immigration clearance counter. She does not like the new country because of her bitter experience in the new atmosphere. Her disagreement with the new surroundings drives her to isolation. She feels more alienated and lonelier and experiences the double process of immigration. Eventually, Nina also tries to assimilate into the Western culture. But time and again she is confronted with the question of belongingness. Nina yearns to have a child and fill the vacuum in her life. But she fails to conceive. Barrenness brings boredom in her life. Besides, the sexual dysfunction of Ananda causes discontent in the life of the couple. She feels like a shadow. Kapur skilfully brings out the psychic conflicts of an immigrant wife. Nina, in a way to evacuate her loneliness, decides to do a degree in library science. There she meets Anton and, in his company, she feels relaxed. An alienated and dissatisfied Nina gets into a physical relationship with Anton. Ananda too has an extramarital affair with Mandy. The secrets of them increase the distance between Ananda and Nina. Nina wants to get rid of all the dirt and decides to make a fresh start to which Ananda did not react much. She gives up her marriage and Western life. She finally decides to stand on her own. Nina heads out for the job interview at the University of New Brunswick. She looks forward in the direction of reorientation to stabilize her socio-psychological conditions.

Manju Kapur's fifth novel Custody reveals the unimagined insecurities of married life, the divorce, and the battle for custody of the children and its consequences on them. The story weaves around the lives of two women, Shagun and Ishita. Shagun, the beautiful woman with uncommon green colour eyes, is the wife of Raman, the intellect. They are blessed with two children, Arjun and Roohi. They had a happy life until Raman introduced his wife to Ashok Khanna, his new chief market executive. The marriage that was smooth so far gets shattered after Shagun gets attracted to Ashok and enjoys the moments in his company. Raman discovers his wife's love affair but Shagun does not sustain it and asks for divorce. On the other hand, Ashok is ready to accept the two biological children of Raman and Shagun. As per the court's judgment, Arjun is given custody of Shagun and Roohi under the custody of Raman. Parallel to this story, the author introduces Ishita, a kind and generous woman. She leads a happy married life. The happiness slowly fades away when she is diagnosed as infertile and the conjugal cord ends in divorce. She meets Raman and fate unites them together. She shows true love towards Roohi. Shagun settles with Ashok. Manju Kapur mainly explores the emotional world of women in her works. Her narratives display a rare imaginative knowledge of various forces at work and a keen understanding of feminine sensibility.

Manju Kapur's considerably different and candid account of events sets her apart from other Indian women writers of English-language novels. She doesn't hold anything back in her fiction. Consequently, she faces criticism from India's orthodox community for her candid conversation about sexual issues. However, she is the last person to be concerned about, what conventional readers have to say about her fiction's subject matter. As a woman novelist, Manju Kapur has focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society. She has a great understanding of the depth of the psyche of a woman and her problems. She explores the world of urban women and emphatically says that even in modern times with all socio-political as well as economic achievements, the graph of women's exploitation is shockingly rising.

Women are sometimes driven into the net by their defenders due to unavoidable circumstances, while

their ambition and desire for independence might sometimes undermine them. Kapur's women do not believe in suffering passively. They struggle with all of their effort to reach the heights of happiness and success in a male-dominated society. They revolt and shape their fate by they are self-sufficient and strongly opposing subordination. Kapur is a feminist, as the main concern among her writings is 'Woman'. The woman occupies the central position in her fictitious universe. However, her women character does not belong to the initial 'FEMININE' phase. As a feminist, she belongs in the third phase, instead of protesting patriarchal norms, feminists strive for self-discovery. As a writer of women-centered literature, she is conscious of perhaps the most striking distinction between man and woman. She believes that a woman must develop a true identity of her own, she must destroy the economic, sociopolitical, and cultural restrictions imposed on her by numerous causes over time. Her novels demonstrate her attempts to disrupt Indian society to dominate patriarchal ideals. In this male-dominated society, women are forced to learn since childhood. How to compromise and adjust to secondary rank. Adolescents the stage makes them instead of protesting patriarchal norms, feminists strive for self-discovery. Cultural restrictions were imposed on her by numerous causes over time. The stage makes them think that their desires will be fulfilled in their marriages for they look at marriage as a solution to their problems.

But in reality, marriage shatters all their dreams and they suffer miserably in their marital lives. This confusing situation compels them to take such steps, which is a major deviation from the established traditional norms.

The present study attempts to make comprehensive critical comments on the fiction of Manju Kapur with an emphasis on the image of women portrayed in her novels. It aims to assess her novels and explore the versatile personality of Kapur. It is also intended to show how she is different from other Indian women writers in English. Since it seeks to explore and explicate overall images of women who appeared in her novels, it would be a fascinating study from the Indian point of view. As the present study is restricted only to her novels, more emphasis would be on the image of women with

critical comments regarding the new emerging woman of modern India. She emphasizes the quest for meaning in life, identity, and the unfulfilled emotional life of the characters through her novels.

Examining Kapur's women characters in the context of their sociocultural and domestic contexts is a modest endeavour. Kapur is more conscious of the situation since she is a woman. She gives us the essential facts and alerts us to the women's suffering and the unfair treatment they receive from their peers in a patriarchal culture. Consequently, the female characters in her books seem to be living, breathing humans.

However, it is an important assertion that though Kapur's novels such as *Difficult Daughter*, *Married Woman*, *Home*, and *The Immigrants*, etc. are strong in the portrayal of women characters, the analysis of the novels indicates that her focus is only on the women protagonists, and the other secondary female characters are simply mentioned. Furthermore, her novels move around only the metropolitan women whereas rural women do not find a place in her novels. Kapur restricts her characters to the urban area, ignoring the life of ordinary, illiterate rural Indian women. In this context, her remarks regarding the inspiration behind her novels are of considerable importance. For instance, she points out that her portrayal of *Virmathi* is partly autobiographical.

The female characters that predominate in Kapur's imaginative universe are very contemporary. They live opulent, unrestrained, and dazzling lives. They have their own economy and are not subject to moral and social constraints. However, the patriarchal lifestyle in the manly superiority and male hegemony in a variety of important parts in the marginalization and oppression of these women. Being a post-modern author who is extremely audacious and combative.

Kapur dares to investigate the obscure truths of living in a global society. In her writings, she questions long-standing customs. Her success as a writer primarily stems from her comprehension of women's psyches and issues. Her examination of the status of modern metropolitan women and the difficulties she encounters are substantial. Man has historically been seen as a woman's guardian,

protector, and master. The actual way that men and women have interacted over the ages is following a predetermined pattern, it implies that men should rule and women should submit. The slave, the master, the woman, the god, and the woman, the spiritual, man for the hearth.

Her female leads are shown with reasonable clarity and a greater sense of compassion. Virmathi, Astha, and Nisha have all been presented as composed spouses who accept their fates without blaming anyone. They are women who have no resentment toward the men who have harmed their feelings and abandoned them to care for their families and daughters. The message of her writings is that women must pursue their identities.

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