

# Feministic Perspectives in Manju Kapur's Fiction

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## ABSTRACT

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent suffer and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and many women

as an individual rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting the individual self. This women is trying to be herself and yet does not wish to break up the family ties. Since Gandhiji helped the women to cross the threshold of family life and move out into the outer world of freedom struggle and social

reform, the woman is presented with varied opportunities not only today but also yesterday during freedom movement. Yet writing in 1998, Manju Kapur, in her novels presents women who try to establish their own identity. The women of India have indeed achieved their success in half a century of Independence, but if there is to be a true female, independence, much remains to be done. The fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat.

Manju Kapur's female protagonists are mostly

educated, aspiring individual caged with in 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.

#### PAPER.

It is commonly believed that all people should be treated equally in legal, economic social arenas- regardless of gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other similar pre-dominant identifying traits. Feminism includes the idea that a person's gender does not define who they are or their worth; that being a woman should put a person at an overall- and especially institutionalized- disadvantage.

Feminism aims to remove the imbalance in society and it also aims to provide women with same rights and opportunities as men, in order to be able to take their right ful place in the world. After the feminist re-awakening in the 1970's feminist began to realize that equal rights alone cannot free women from sexual and social subordination.

Intellectual starvation, economic expression, commercial exploitation, domestic domination, physical abuse, sexual harassment and lack of personal freedom continued to affect the lives of women in spite of laws to the contrary. Hence, Western feminist writers and critics were forced to re-analyze and re-access the socio-

cultural setup looking for clues to explain the mechanism of patriarchy that contrived to keep women eternally subjugated.

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent suffer and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and many women as an individual rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting the individual self. This woman is trying to be herself and yet

does not wish to break up the family ties. Since Gandhi ji helped the women to cross the threshold of family life and move out into the outer world of freedom struggle and social reform, the woman is presented with varied opportunities not only today but also yesterday during freedom movement. Yet writing in 1998, Manju Kapur, in her novels presents women who try to establish their own identity. The women of India have indeed achieved their success in half a century of Independence, but if there is to be a true female, independence, much remains to be done. The fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat.

In her quest of identify, Virmati the central character of the novel, rebels against tradition. She is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. The title of the novel 'Difficult Daughters' is an indication to the message that a woman, who tries in search of an identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well. *Difficult Daughters* is the story of a young woman, named virmati born in Amritsar into an austere and high mined household. The story tells how she is torn between family duty, the desire for education and elic it love.. This is a story of sorrow, love and compromise. The major portion deals

with Virmati's love affairs with professor and rest part describes fighting struggle for freedom. 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 increases over Virmati, being the eldest daughter. Due to her busy routine she does not do well in her studies and fails. She falls in love with a professor, a man who is already married. He sublets a portion of Virmati's house. Thus professor develops on intimate relationship with Virmati and decides an appropriate place for regular meeting. Here Virmati's parents decides to marray

her to an engineer Inderjeet but due to the death in his family marriage is postponed for two years. During this period Virmati passes her FA exam and denies for marriage. Professor insists Virmati on being firm. Now Virmati becomes mentally disturb and goes to Tarashika and drowns herself. She is escaped by the servants of her grand father Lala Divan Chand and returns to her house at Lepel Griffin Road. Everybody inquires the reason and finally she declares that she does not like the boy and wants to study further. So marriage is settled with Indumati, the second daughter.

Now Kasturi has to go with Virmati to Lahore for getting her admit in RBSL

college and principal assures Kasturi that there will be no problem and she has her eye fixed firmly on each one. Sakuntala who has been a source of inspiration for Virmati, visits her regularly. Professor's course of meeting to Viru has yet not stopped and during this period she becomes pregnant. She becomes restless and with the help of her room mate Swarnlata she gets abortion.

After completing her B.T. she returns to Amritsar and is offered the principal ship of a college, she joins it but in Sultanpur too Harish visits her and there meetings are observed by Lalaji. She is dismissed so she decides to go to Nariniketan but on the way

she meets Harish's close friend Poet who is already aware of their intimate relationship. So he does not let her go and calls Harish. He performs all the rituals of marriage. Professor with Virmati returns home. During her conjugal life Virmati feels that it would have been better if she had not been married with Harish. After sometime she gives birth to a daughter Ida. And at the beginning of the novel this girl Ida ponders over her mother's life.

Virmati has to fight against the power of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy symbolized by the mother figure. The rebel in Virmati might have actually

exchange one kind of slavery for another. But towards the end she becomes free, free even from the oppressive love of her husband. Once she succeed in doing that, she gets her husband all by herself, her child the reconciliation with her family. In the patriarchal Indian Society marriage is a means of deliverance from being socially condemned and it relieves a woman from the sense of insecurity and uncertainty. To the older generation marriage is no reason to rebel, it was accepted as a part of life's pleasure and was a phase of initiating certain Dharmas associated with social and religious institutions. Off course love was not the prerequisite or a desired basis for marriage. If

Virmati's mother, Kasturi and Ganga (Prof. Harish Chandra's first wife) seeks pleasure in domestic up doings. Virmate struggles between the physical and moral, the head and the heart. Finally she gives way to her heart and Virmati", the central character of the novel, the protagonist, who tries to cross the threshold of the patriarchal system and become self-secured, but still in possession of her husband, and „Ida" , Virmati" s daughter, denies to be in possession of any male character around her. Suman Bala remarks-

*“Right from birth a woman is thrust with social images, rewards and punishments that are carefully designed to ensure that she does not*

*develop the qualities associated with men. Unmarried girls feel the constraints of parents and of society to which they belong.”<sup>1</sup>*

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 was brought up with large supplements of fear. She was her parents only child. Her education, her character, her health, her marriage these were her parent's burdens. 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



though of him kept her insides churning. She was unable to eat, sleep or study. In the main time she is emotionally engage with Rhan and they enjoy physical relationship. This relationship is finished within a few days as Rohan moves to Oxford for further studies and her marriage is settled with Hemant who belongs to a bureaucrat family. They live in Vasant Vihar, a posh colony in New Delhi. They start their married life and soon Astha is fed up with it. Astha starts teaching in a public school after much resistance from her husband and her parents.. During her staying in this school she participates in a workshop on communalism which is being led by an intellectual

artiste Aijaz Akhtar Kha, the founder of 'The Street Theater Group'. Aijaz teaches history and during the holidays he performs plays in school, slums, factories, streets small town and villages to create empathy and to generate social awareness. Although Astha and been a mother of a son and a daughter by this time. She is festinated by the multifaceted personality of Aijaz. But ferocious soon this relationship is over as the workshop finishes. After a few days Astha reads the news of Aijaz's murder. Babri Masjid is demolished in Ayodhya and there is a lot of turmoil throughout the country. To establish religious harmony and social integration processions are organized

by 'The Street Theatre Group'. In one of such processions Astha meets Pipeelika and she comes to know that she is the widow of Aijaz. She feels great empathy to Pipeelika and a powerful physical relationship is established between them. This relationship is a challenge for her husband and family. They both live together and deep emotional attachment develops between them. Astha is on the verge of losing her conventional marriage. Pipeelika leaves India to study abroad and Astha returns back to her family. 'A Married Woman' is beautifully, honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment, set at a time of political and religious turmoil. Manju

Kapur explains about the relationship of Astha and Pipee in an interview-

*“This relationship suggested itself to me as an interesting means of making Astha mature and change. An affair with a man would have been the classic cliché and so I ruled it out and tried out a same sex affair. I don’t know how successful I have been nor is this based on any real life relationship. It is as I said a writers experiment with a plot.”*<sup>2</sup>

. 'Home, the third novel, by Manju Kapur is fast moving story which makes an ordinary middle class family's life in Delhi. The main character or the patriarch of a cloth business, Banwarilal lives in New Delhi neighborhood of Karol Bagh.

Banwarilal believes in the old ways and is the firm believer of that men work out of the home, woman within. 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, being the elder one. He has one sister who becomes widow in her early life. She has a child named Vicky. They also join them in their house in Karol Bagh. At the beginning of the story Sona and Rupa both sisters are childless. They could not conceive for

a long time. Sona keeps but it is of no use. Sona belongs to a rich family in comparison of her sister Rupa. Rupa's husband is an educated man. They pass their lives happily. After a long time Sona gives birth to Nisha and then to Virat. Nisha is physically tortured by Vicky, her cousin. She feels mentally disturbed so she is sent to Rupa's home for a change. Here she gets education well. After some time she returns to her home where no one pays much attention towards her studies and she gets compartment in two subjects. She is guided by Premnath. She passes in it and enters in college for getting higher education. She meets a boy and decides to marry him ignoring his

caste and creed. . Nisha represents the mental conflicts, the restlessness, the percipient accumulated personal screams and mental revolts of a woman. Her skin problem, which is a result of her stress and depression, proves how much she is broken and shattered when forced to sit at home with a feeling of nothingness.

*“Her family” s attitude to college proved sustaining. Higher studies were just a time pass; it was not as though she was going to use her education. Working was out of the question and marriage was around the corner.”*<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the novel depicts how family norms are is ignored by the new generation. Manju Kapur's novels

present the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands and in this way providing a medium for self expression in the works of Manju Kapur.

Custody, Another successful novel by Manju Kapur, explores beautifully the finer nuances of a divorce- both pre and post *The Immigrant*, Manju Kapur's fourth novel, is based on the story of an immigrant woman, who goes through many problems while adjusting to a new country. Nina, a professor at Miranda House and still unmarried, is

the protagonist of the novel. Her mother's only wish is to see her daughter married and settled. Nina marries Anand, a dentist, leaves her job in India and goes to Canada with Anand. She faces many problems while adjusting in that foreign country. She is unable to find a good job there. We can notice the psychological conflict playing in her mind, as she ventures the western way of life and culture. She struggles between the irony of traditions and modernity, and craves to assimilate these two extremes for a new future. She feels like being thrown into the sea even before learning how to swim. She feels lonely at home. Manju Kapur throws light on the psychology

of the men who are so egoistic that they feel embarrassed to share their problems with their wives. Anand goes through a long therapy for the sexual problem, he is facing, but he never shares this with his wife. Nina feels cheated and betrayed when she knows about all this. She decides to become self-dependent, does an M.A. in Library Science, and joins a woman counselor group.

*“Underneath the emancipation, said Lore the western woman may not be better off than her sisters elsewhere we have privileges that make it harder to uncover our inner servitude. Without awareness we can be both-manipulated and manipulative, exploited as well as exploitative”<sup>4</sup>*

Nina gets some friends in the newfound land. When she discovers Anand’s relationship with a Canadian woman, and leaves him to find her own feet in the new country. Nina learns to be self-dependent in a faraway country by educational awareness.

It will be interesting to note man woman relationship in the three

novels of Manju Kapur. As an element of feminism especially in the realm of biological, sexual, cultural and racial aspects will also be probed in all the three novels.

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