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FEMININE SENSIBILITIES IN THE NOVELS OF MANJU KAPUR

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ABSTRACT

Manju Kapur is a post – Colonial writer who intuitively Perceives the position of women in a *Kapur* atriarchal society and deals with the problems of women. She is a writer of International repute. With five critically acclaimed novels to her credit, *Difficult Daughters*, *A married woman*, *Home*, *the Immigrant and custody*, she has emerged as a significant and eminent writer in the Indian writing in English. Kapur envisions a society which is free from gender discrimination. She creates the female characters in a manner in which they rebel against the oppressive mechanisms of the male-dominated society. All her protagonists – Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Nisha in *Home*, Astha in *A Married woman*, Nina in *The Immigrant*, Ishita and Shagun in *Custody* and Tara in “Chocolate” challenge male chivinism for the fulfillment of their aspirations and dreams.

key words: Manju kapur, women’s dilemma, Select Novels, Identity Crisis

A Tremedous change has taken place in the cliché of portraying women in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the rich Indian custom and the traditional values of the Indian family and the society. Of late, many Indian women writers including manju Kapur and shashi Deshpande have described woman as an individual rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering, trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting her individual self. The woman they portray tries to be herself and yet does not wish to break up the family ties. She fights for self – respect and she longs for self reliance within the space of the family bondage. Gandhi’s outcry for women’s liberation has helped women to cross the threshold of family life and move out into the outer world of freedom struggle and social reforms. Since then women have been willingly taking up various roles of their chlice right from the freedom movement.

Kapur presents her as a woman who displays tremendous strength of mind and overcomes her rejection. Kapur highlights the predicament of women characters through her writings and reiterates the atrocities against women through the words of Shakuntala, “Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else”. (DD15)

Another character through which Kapur emphasizes her concept of the modern woman is Ida, the daughter of Virmati. She is very impatient towards her mother’s weaknesses. When her Parvati Masi says that Virmati was a simple girl at heart ,Ida says, “I hate the word ‘Simple’. Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways”. (DD 207) No woman, who dares to spurn patriarchal protection can afford to be ignorant, simple or naïve. Shivani observes:”this novel explores the contrast between the non-acceptance of women’s freedom when the whole

nation was united together to fight for independence. The novelist hints at the attitude, a moral fiber of the Indian society that attaches women's role only for family purposes". (Shivani 3)

Kapur's *A Married Woman* depicts of an artist whose desires for her career and extra marital relations every now and then challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Although Astha, a married woman of a middle class family does not face so many challenges as Virmati has faced, her life becomes a black cave when she desires to write poetry, make sketches and participate in Ayodhya Movement and gets involved in socio-political activities. Her husband's condition is worse than that of a rubber stamp because whether he permits or not, if she decides to go, she goes irrespective of her husband, children or mother-in-law's bothering about her. Kapur has made an in-depth study in the relationship between Astha, Aijaz and Pipeelika. Astha and Pipeelika are impressed with the community as they are good friends, and partners. Astha enjoys lesbian relationship with Pipee and she finds her life adventurous. Dr. Ashok Kumar talks about the plight of Indian women as he points out, "they struggle between tradition and modernity and develop the awareness of the New Woman, who has a voice of her own". (Kumar 200) Through the lesbian relationship Kapur says that, "canonizes and commemorates her insulted feminine sensibility raising the male tantrum to socially transform a society". (qtd in Kumar 198)

Kapur voices concern for her female characters who essentially long for family ties but do not lose hold of their individuality also. Nisha, in *Home* is in contrast with Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, for she does not fall victim to the stereotyped values of a middleclass joint family. Nisha acts as a rebel and takes up the path of economic independence which she is sure will lead to her liberation and assertion of her individuality. Nisha the female protagonist is in search of a real 'home'. A home in the true sense is a place that provides comfort, relaxation and a sense of security to its inhabitants. The problem starts with Nisha falling in love with a boy as he belongs to a lower caste and is considered unsuitable for her.

Nisha's inner troubles are expressed through her skin. Her skin gets discolored and tarnished as she cannot control her life according to her wish. "Nisha's nights were now ones of restlessness. As she tosses and turned on her bed, her hands absently crept around the itchy patches on her skin.....Rub, rub, but the skin refused to be satisfied". (Home 217) Nisha snaps off all familial relations after her love ends with Suresh and strives to establish her individuality and becomes an entrepreneur. She starts her own as an entrepreneur. Hence Nisha is definitely the New Woman with her own feminine sensibilities.

Nisha never crosses the boundaries of morality and values. Considerable amount of her life has passed under the shadow of her aunt Rupa who is also so conscious of her freedom and identity. The power struggle among minor women characters like Suneeta, Sona and Puja is insignificant. Nisha who opposes her mother to get confined in the kitchen ends up as one. She is married and after ten months, she gives birth to twins accomplishing the purpose behind marriage. But contrary to it, she loses both her status as a decision maker and also her economic freedom along with her own Nisha's Creations. A.N. Dwivedi records his statement on marriage as, "Nisha has to sacrifice her genuine, pure love for the false family honours". (Dwivedi 68)

Kapur's *Immigrant* it she discusses the life of Nina. She is a thirty years old lecturer in English who struggles to settle somewhere but like Virmati, Astha and Nisha, the question of Nina's marriage is a hurdle in the peaceful living of her mother. She marries Ananda who is a Canadian immigrant and she has a happy marriage. But tragedy strikes when she comes to know that Ananda is impotent. As she is far away from her home, she cannot share her grief with others. She goes to a college where she meets Anton and has illicit affair with him. But she does not feel guilty of what she does and this is how she renounces both the Indian institution of family and marriage. Ashok Kumar rightly says "In *The Immigrant* Nisha's dream of a happy married life ends with a sour note and she is surging ahead with the hope of establishing herself independently on her own foot in an alien country". (Kumar 68)

Within a very short period of time, she is seduced by Anton. She leaves Canada for the cremation of her mother in which she finds no assistance from Ananda. Her life becomes more intolerable and she flies to the University of New Brunswick. Manju Kapur puts the whole difference between the two briefly,

Life was what you made of it. You could look at a glass call it half full or half empty. you could look out of the window and see the sky or stare at the mud. How often had he heard his parents make these distinctions between types of people. Well, he knew what manner of person he was. And Nina was definitely his opposite. (*The Immigrant* 330)

In Kapur's *custody*, Shagun, the protagonist, leaves her husband, Raman, after a small dispute and in due course she divorces him. She abandons her family, marries her lover and moves to New York. Then Raman marries Ishita, another divorcee and overcomes the difficult situation in his life. The novel presents the devastating effects of divorce on different stakeholders of a family – the wife, husband, children and in-laws. There is another marriage in *Custody* between Ishita and Suryakanta, which fails because of Ishita's infertility. Shagun has got all she wanted, yet she divorces due to her physical passion, whereas Ishita is divorced for her infertility. Shagun and Ishita both suffer for biological reasons, one for obsession with sex and the other for barrenness.

Kapur has undoubtedly affirmed all possible reasons for marriage and the failure through her protagonists. In *Difficult Daughters*, for Kasturi it is the accountability, for Virmati it is to live and attachment, and for Ida it is to carry the lineage. In *A Married Woman*, Astha's parents want her to marry because they consider it as their responsibility. In *Home*, Nisha is married with Aravind only to assist his family. In *The Immigrant*, Nina's mother wants to marry her daughter so that she can get protection and stability. And in *Custody*, for Ishita and Suryakanta to be joyful, for Shagun and Ashok to follow the excitement, lastly to Raman and Ishita it is the adjustment. Jadhav reflects:

The entire scenario in her novels is feminine. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*; Astha in *A Married woman*; Nisha in *Home*; Nina in *The Immigrant*; and Shagun and Ishita in *Custody* are all middle-class educated urban Indian women struggling to establish themselves with their own independent identities in the patriarchal setup of which they are part and parcel. (Jadhav 186)

The paper evaluates the feminine sensibilities as exhibited in the works of Manju Kapur. The writer converge in marriage, family life, freedom and individual identity and diverge in reaction and revolt. Kapur's protagonists revolt till the end of the novel. Kapur's women select their own life style. Kapur depicts her female characters in a more authoritative tone though Deshpande presents her female characters in a docile manner. Kapur gives foremost importance for extra-marital love in their novels, however this does not provide a true solution to the problems of incompatibility. The succeeding chapter deals with the Techniques of the creative writers, in order to evaluate an effective and proper expression of their artistic intentions.

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